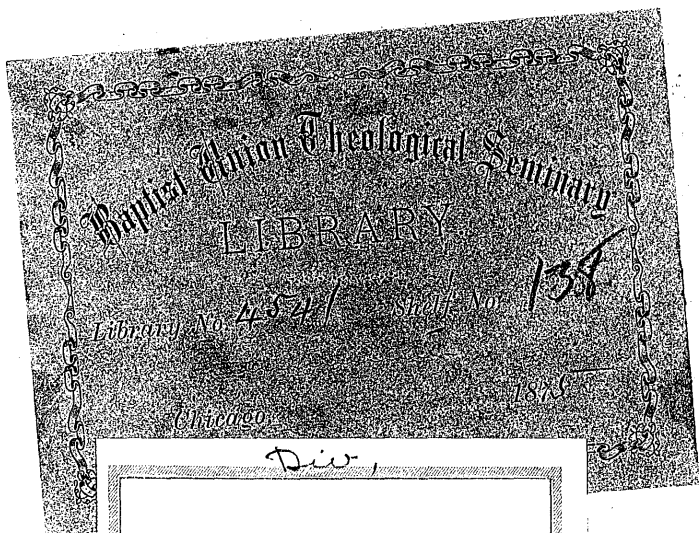




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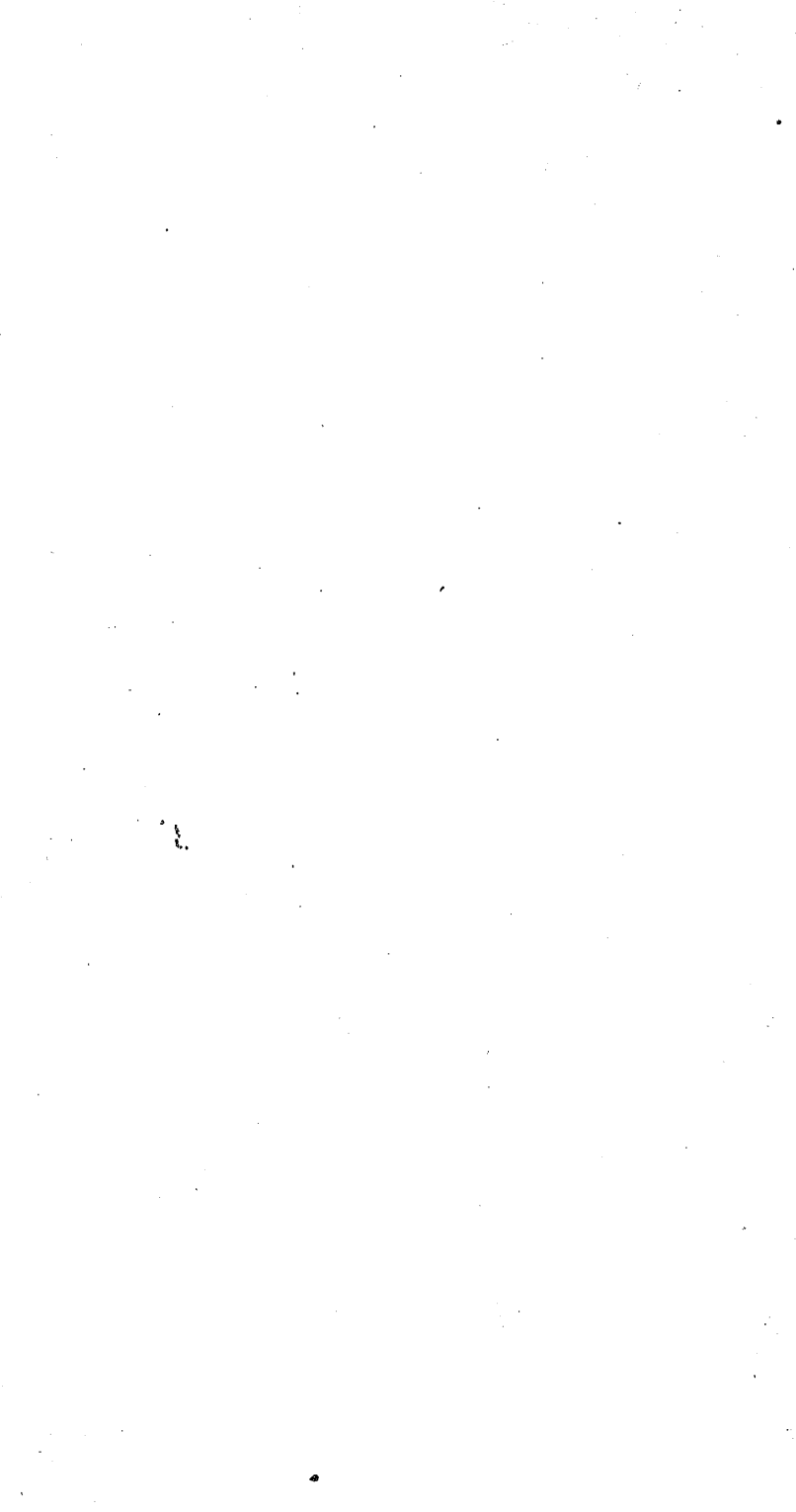


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Thanksgiving - 1868
National Treasury - 204

Christmas 222

George Thompson
1844

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THE PREACHER:

OR

SKETCHES OF ORIGINAL SERMONS,

CHIEFLY SELECTED FROM THE MANUSCRIPTS

OF

TWO EMINENT DIVINES OF THE LAST CENTURY,

FOR THE USE OF LAY PREACHERS AND YOUNG MINISTERS.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

A FAMILIAR ESSAY

ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

FROM THE SECOND LONDON EDITION.

VOL. I.

Philadelphia:

J. WHETHAM, 144 CHESTNUT STREET.

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PREFACE.



A correct habit of Composition is of such importance in the Christian Ministry, that whatever may in any degree contribute to its formation, will need but little introduction or apology. Gifts and talents for the pulpit, however promising, will be employed to little purpose, if the method of imparting knowledge, when acquired, be not properly considered. Order is necessary in every rational undertaking, especially where the highest end is to be attained. "He that cleaveth wood, may put to more strength; but wisdom is profitable to direct."

Many who have enjoyed the advantages of a professional education, and who might therefore be expected to possess a competence for the office of teaching, are often found deficient in taste and judgment, as to the manner of communicating religious truth, and so of promoting the edification and improving the understanding of their auditors. If they possess the ore, they have no ready circulating medium; not indeed for want of fluency, for that also may abound; but for want of a regular association of ideas, and such an arrangement as would lead to a direct and definite result. The mind of the preacher and of the hearer resembles a wandering vagrant, who rapidly and superficially surveys a variety of interesting objects, without the possibility of ascertaining any of their qualities or receiving from them any distinct or permanent impression. Piety may mean well, and zeal may make an ostentatious effort; but it may easily be imagined how much is subtracted from the real usefulness of such preachers, and how much is done by such means to vitiate the taste, enfeeble the judgment, and defeat the object of the Christian ministry.

The present volumes have however been prepared with a view, more especially, to a numerous and respectable class of public teachers, who have not had the advantage of an academical education, and have neither time nor ability to prepare any thing like a regular composition for the pulpit, but who possess, notwithstanding, sufficient capacity to relish and to communicate what might be profitable to their hearers.

In the neighbourhood of most dissenting congregations, in the country at least, there are frequent opportunities of preaching in the villages; and as the resident pastor is generally unable to supply the demand by his own personal exertions, he must either suffer multitudes around him to perish for lack of knowledge, or encourage those of his hearers to impart instruction, who appear the best adapted for the purpose. And though this may be done by reading printed sermons, a practice very common in some places, it is seldom so interesting or impressive, as the warm and spontaneous effusion of the heart. A person who can deliver only a few thoughts in this way, will generally command more attention, and make a deeper impression, than another who merely reads a printed discourse, whatever be its intrinsic excellence.

But nearly as often as this method is attempted, it is found to be attended with considerable difficulty. The person who engages in the important service of affording instruction to others, is neither deficient in piety nor in good sense; he is both intelligent and devout, and capable of communicating what he knows. But he is not in the habit of collecting or arranging his ideas, in any order suited to a public address. His attention has been called to other occupations and pursuits, in which he as much excels the preacher, as the preacher excels him, in the duties of his vocation. In such circumstances therefore, he is sent to make bricks, almost without straw; and would, but cannot, find his way into the city.

Probably these remarks would with more propriety apply to the Baptists and Methodists, who are more in the habit of engaging uneducated preachers, than other

denominations, who either disapprove of lay-preaching, or take no steps to encourage it. Be that as it may, the following Sketches are chiefly intended for persons of that description, and to provide them with a staff, when they walk into the vineyard. Those who need not such assistance, will excuse the attempt to strengthen and encourage their weaker brethren.

The late Mr. Fuller, in particular, took much pleasure in assisting young ministers in their theological inquiries, for which he was eminently qualified, and also in encouraging useful gifts. Several members of his church were successively employed in village preaching, and occasionally supplied destitute congregations in the neighbourhood. One of these, not regularly educated for the ministry, solicited his advice; and the Letter written on this occasion, being communicated to the Editor many years ago, by the person to whom it was originally addressed, now makes its appearance at the head of the following pages. A copy of this Letter having been transmitted to a gentleman at Edinburgh, where it was much admired, the Author, in compliance with an urgent request to continue and enlarge his plan, afterwards wrote one or two other valuable Essays in the form of Letters, on the Mixed and Applicatory mode of Composition, which were copied and sent to the same quarter, but have, it seems, been since mislaid or lost. His Letters on 'Expounding the Scriptures,' and on the 'Subject-matter of Sermons,' were written at a much later date, and on a different occasion; and having already been given to the public, they require here no farther notice.

A considerable part of the Sketches which compose the present volumes, were transcribed from original MSS. nearly thirty years ago; and though not written with a view to publication, the Editor deems them too valuable to be lost, or left to other hands, and hopes that in some degree at least they will answer the purposes intended. These are not to supersede the necessity of thinking, not to furnish an excuse for idleness, nor merely to provide a train of thought for the memory; but to guide the judgment of the uneducated preacher,

to give him a taste for useful composition, and to aid his voluntary, generally unbought, labours, in the service of the Gospel.

It will be seen that blanks are left in the printing, to shew where enlargement is required, or where an idea may be advantageously dilated and amplified, in the course of the delivery.

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ESSAY

ON THE

COMPOSITION OF A SERMON:

OR,

'PLAIN AND FAMILIAR THOUGHTS, ADDRESSED TO A YOUNG MINISTER,
FROM HIS PASTOR.'

My dear Brother,

You have requested my thoughts on the Composition of a Sermon. There are several publications on this subject, well worthy of your notice. If what I may offer have any peculiar claim to your attention, it will be chiefly on account of its familiarity.

The form or manner in which a Sermon is composed and delivered, is of some importance, inasmuch as it influences the attention, and renders the matter delivered more or less easy of being comprehended and retained.

In general, I do not think that a minister of Jesus Christ should aim at fine composition for the pulpit. We ought to use sound speech, and good sense; but if we aspire after great elegance of expression, or labour to be very exact in the formation of our periods, though we may amuse and please the ears of a few, we shall not profit the many; and consequently, shall not answer the great end of our ministry. Illiterate hearers may be very poor judges of preaching; yet the *effect* which it produces upon them, is the best criterion of its real excellence.

A considerable part of the ministerial gift consists in fruitfulness of invention; but that which greatly aids the composition and delivery of a sermon is *spirituality* of mind, without which we shall get no good ourselves, and be likely to do but little good to others. The first thing therefore, before we sit down to study, should be to draw near to God in prayer. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

When a passage of Scripture is selected as the ground of a discourse, it is necessary to read it in connexion with the context, and endeavour, by your own judgment, to gain a clear idea of its genuine meaning. Having formed your own opinion, I would then advise you to consult expositors, who may throw additional light upon it, or give a different meaning. And if the sense they offer, appear to be supported by sufficient evidence, you will of course relinquish the opinion you had previously formed. Be satisfied, at all events, that you have the mind of the Holy Spirit before you venture to proceed.

In the next place, having determined on the meaning of the text, it is

necessary to examine the force of each word, or term of importance, which it may happen to contain. This may be done by attentively observing the use of the same expression in other places of Scripture, through the medium of a concordance; but here a good judgment of your own is requisite, that you may select a few out of the parallel passages, which will best illustrate that under consideration. Some of the worst sermons are made out of a concordance, being a mere collection of similar sounds, which instead of casting light upon the subject, tend only to darken counsel with words without knowledge. The force of words or terms may also be examined to great advantage by a judicious use of contrast, or placing them one at a time in opposition to those which are intended to convey a different meaning. The following may serve as an example—

Suppose your text be Psal. cxlv. 16. “Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”

Begin with the term “openest;”—“Thou openest thine hand. What an idea does this convey of the paternal *goodness* of God toward his creation. How *opposite* to the conduct of many of his creatures one towards another, whose hearts and hands are shut.

What an idea also does it convey of the *ease* with which the wants of the whole creation are supplied. Let me pause a moment, and think of their wants. What a quantity of vegetable and animal food is daily consumed in one town,—in one large city,—in a nation,—in the whole world. Yet mankind compose only a very small part of this vast family; it includes “every living thing.” Oh what innumerable wants throughout all animate nature; in the air, on the earth, in the waters! Whence come all their supplies? Thou openest thine hand, and all are satisfied.

And can these various necessities be supplied, by only opening his hand; what then must our salvation be? That is a work of wonderful expense: the Lord openeth his hand, and satisfieth all creation; but he hath “purchased the Church with his own blood.” God is all-sufficient as to power, in the one case as in the other; but there are things relating to his moral conduct which he cannot do. “He cannot deny himself.” Here lies the difficulty of salvation.

In what a *variety of ways* are our wants supplied. The earth is fruitful, the air is full of life, the clouds empty themselves upon the earth, the sun pours forth its genial rays; but the operation of all these second causes is only the “opening of his hand.” Parents sustained us in our childhood, and provided for our necessities; ways are still opened for our future subsistence; connexions are formed, which prove sources of comfort; friends are kind in seasons of extremity; supplies are presented from quarters we never expected. . . . What are all these but the opening of his hand? If his hand were shut, what a world would this be! The heavens would soon become as brass, and the earth as iron; famine, pestilence, and death would follow in the train. See Psal. civ. 27—29.

You may next notice the pronoun “Thou”—thou openest thine hand. Here it is easy to infer, If thou openest *thine* hand, shall I shut mine against my poor brother? This important sentiment, so well

adapted to the Application of the subject, will properly occupy a place towards the close of the discourse.

Next consider the term "hand." There is a difference between the *hand* and the *heart*. God opens his hand in a way of providence; towards his worst enemies. He gave Nebuchadnezzar all the kingdoms of the earth, Jer. xxvii. 6. But he opens his heart in the gospel of his Son. This is the best portion of the two; and while we are thankful for the one, let us not be satisfied without the other. Rather, let us pray with Jabez to be blessed "indeed," and that we may have a Joseph's portion; not only the precious things of the earth, and the fulness thereof, but the good will of him that dwelt in the bush.

Proceed: Thou "satisfiest" the desire, &c. Here I see that God does not give sparingly. It seems to be a characteristic of the divine nature, both in the natural and moral world, to excite desires, not with a view to disappoint, but to satisfy them. What a consoling thought is this! If there be any desires in us which are not satisfied, it is because they are self-created, and therefore blameable; or it may be owing to an artificial scarcity, produced by luxury, improvidence, or some other sinful cause. God implants no desires as our Creator, for which he has not made ample provision; and none as our Redeemer and Sanctifier, but what he will abundantly fulfil. How great is his goodness; and how great is his beauty!

ARRANGEMENT.

Having examined the force of every important term, by contrasting it with the opposite ideas, and noted them down as they occurred, you will find yourself possessed of a number of useful thoughts, which may be disposed of to advantage. Your next business therefore is to arrange them in order, or to give each thought that place in your discourse which it will occupy to the greatest advantage. Many sermons are little better than a mob of ideas; they contain some good sentiments, but have no object in view, no specific purpose to accomplish. The hearer is continually tempted to answer the preacher, by saying to himself, 'very true, very true; but what then? What is it you are aiming at; and what is this to the purpose? A preacher, then, if he would interest a judicious hearer, must have an object at which he aims, and not lose sight of it throughout the whole of his discourse.

This is what writers on these subjects call *unity of design*; and this is a matter of far greater importance than studying well-formed periods, or seeking after elegant expressions. It is this that fixes the attention of an audience, and creates an interest in the subject. One thing at once, is a maxim in common life; and in this way the greatest men have made the greatest proficiency. Shun therefore a multiplicity of divisions and subdivisions. He who endeavours to say every thing in a single discourse, in effect says nothing.

Unity of design may however be preserved, consistently with various methods of division; but the thing itself is indispensable to good preaching. The following reasons induce me to acquiesce in this opinion.

1. The human mind is so formed as to delight in unity. To divide

the attention is to weaken, if not destroy it. PRESIDENT EDWARD's Sermons, though in some respects improper for imitation, are in this peculiarly worthy of notice. They all exhibit some one great leading truth ; that truth contains the spirit of his text, and serves for the title of his sermon. Look over the table of contents to his xxxiii. Sermons and you will find the title of each adapted to cast light upon his text. The sentiment expressed in the title, he calls the 'doctrine' of the next ; and all he says upon the subject is intended to illustrate, establish, or improve it. It might be of use, if in our compositions, we were obliged to give titles to them. Many of what are called sermons would be found to require three or four titles, to answer to their contents ; and which at once proves, that properly speaking, they are any thing but sermons.

2. It has been said, and perhaps justly, that *evidence* should form the substance of every doctrinal discourse. Evidence may be drawn from various sources ; as, Scripture-testimony, example, the reason of things, &c. But evidence always supposes some leading truth to be proved : where this is not the case, the preacher gives himself no opportunity of advancing evidence ; consequently his sermon, if it may be so called, will be without body, without substance, and will contain nothing that is adapted to leave a strong impression upon a thinking mind. In opening a battery against a wall, you would not throw your shot at random, first at one place and then at another ; but would direct your whole force against a particular spot. In the one case, your labour would be lost ; in the other, you are likely to make an effectual impression.

3. The obvious connexion between the various parts of a subject, required by unity of design, greatly assists the memory, both of the preacher and the hearer. To attempt to remember six or seven different objects, bearing no manner of relation to each other, would be found almost impracticable, but take an equal number, though different in nature, yet possessing some point of unity which associates them in the mind, and the recollection is easy. Thus sun, moon, stars, earth, air, fire, and water, being so many principal parts of the one creation, are remembered without any great exertion of the retentive faculty.

4. I could not so well satisfy my own conscience in the work of the ministry, unless I had some specific object in view, some interesting truth to communicate, or some avowedly important duty to enforce. When anticipating the approach of the sabbath, the question has often occurred to me, What message have I to deliver to the people of my charge ; what important doctrine to establish ; what sin to expose ; what duty to inculcate ; what case to meet ; what acknowledged truth to improve ? The method too frequently adopted, does not afford a satisfactory answer to any of these inquiries. On the contrary, the preacher seems to say that he had no immediate object in view ; only that he had taken a text for the purpose of saying something about it, that should fill up the time usually allotted for such an exercise.

After going over the passage of Scripture in the way proposed, in order to elicit some useful thoughts for the composition of a sermon, you could be at no loss to determine, that its leading topic would be,—*The*

Bounty of Providence. This is what the old divines called the 'doctrine' of the text; and when they printed their sermons, this was the title of them.

DIVISION.

Perhaps you will ask, What am I to do with this doctrine when I have found it? Am I to make no divisions or subdivisions? What is my discourse to consist of? Yes, there must be divisions, and perhaps subdivisions; but let them not be so many distinct subjects, which have no relation to each other; let them rather be so many parts of an entire whole.

When I have a subject before me, I sometimes ask myself three questions. What is it—on what evidence does it rest—and what does it concern me, or any of the people, if it be true? The divisions of many subjects will therefore be,—I. Explain the doctrine—II. Establish it—III. Improve it.

Let us try the above subject on this plan, and see whether we cannot find a place under one or other of these heads, for all the forgoing thoughts which turned up spontaneously on looking over the terms; and perhaps as we go along, others no less interesting may occur.

INTRODUCTION.

However men may have been in the dark respecting God, it has not been for want of evidence. He is not far from every one of us; for in him we live and move and have our being. Creation is full of God—all his works praise him.

The passage before us is wonderfully sublime; it expresses a great truth in the most simple language. It represents the Supreme Being as the Father of his creation, surrounded with an innumerable family, whose eyes all wait on him for daily food; while he with paternal goodness opens his bounteous hand, and satisfies their various wants.

The subject that invites our attention is—The Bounty of Providence. In discoursing on it, I shall offer some remarks by way of explanation;—notice the evidence on which it rests;—and then attempt an improvement of the subject.

I. Offer some remarks by way of EXPLANATION.

There is much discontent amongst men—Objections to the equity and goodness of Divine Providence are too generally entertained; and there are but few persons who feel themselves duly impressed with the reality and importance of the doctrine. In order therefore to obviate such objections, I would observe—

1. The desires which God satisfies are to be restricted to those of his own creating. Men have a number of artificial, self-created, and sinful desires.—These he does not engage to satisfy; but merely those which are natural—

2. Though God satisfies the desire of every living thing, yet not all in the same way; but of every creature according to its nature and

circumstances.—Many of the creatures, like the lily, neither toil nor spin; but receive the bounties of providence ready prepared to their hands. This is not the case with all: it is not thus with man: for though we are forbidden to be inordinately careful, we must generally labour for what we have. It is a part of the load laid upon us, that by the sweat of the brow we shall eat our bread. Nor is there more of judgment than of mercy in this sentence. Idleness is a soil which produces a luxuriance of evil; and considering what man is, it is well that he is compelled to labour. It is generally amongst the rich, who have nothing to do, and the very poor, who will do but little, that wickedness is most prevalent.—

3. The text expresses what the Lord does ordinarily, not universally, or in all cases.—There are times of famine, when God as it were shuts his hand, on account of the sins of men. And when he does this, the heavens become brass, and the earth iron, and multitudes perish for want of bread.—There are also cases more common than those of famine: great numbers of mankind labour under the hardships of poverty, pine away, and are stricken through, for want of the fruits of the field—This is one of those evils under which the world groans, owing to the sin of man. If there were no waste or intemperance amongst one part of mankind, there would be a sufficiency, and more than a sufficiency for all the rest—

II. State a few of the EVIDENCES by which this important truth is supported.

Some subjects are difficult to prove, not from a scarcity, but from a profusion of evidence: where this is the case, the difficulty lies in selection. I shall content myself in offering three things to your consideration—

1. The supplies we constantly receive cannot be ascribed to our own labour, as their proper or procuring cause.—The whole of human labour is only a kind of manufacture of the materials with which the bountiful Creator is pleased to furnish us. We make nothing; we only change the form of different productions to suit our own convenience.—We are as really, though not so sensibly dependent on God, as Israel was in the wilderness, who were fed with manna from heaven.—Also, when we have laboured to the utmost, it amounts to nothing, without a divine blessing. All therefore that we possess, proceeds from the opening of his hand—

2. A consideration of the number and magnitude of the wants of creatures will convince us that nothing short of the all-sufficiency of God can supply them.—What a quantity of vegetable and animal food is required by a single town, for only one day; and what for a city, a nation, a world, during successive ages—What are men, however numerous, compared with the whole animate creation. All nature teems with life; the air, the earth, the sea—Whence can all these be continually supplied, but by him that made them? Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing—

3. If we consider the various ways and means by which our sup-

plies reach us, we shall be convinced of the truth in question.—The Lord does not satisfy our desires immediately, but through the medium of second causes; and though we may be too insensible of that hand which puts all in motion, yet it is no less engaged than if we were supplied by miracle——

A chain of concatenation of causes is apparent in the works of God.—Our food is prepared by a complicate but beautiful machinery. The heavens are made to hear the earth, the earth to hear the corn, the wine and the oil, and the corn the wine and the oil to hear the people——What is that tendency which we discover in various parts of the creation to satisfy the desires of the rest, but the operation of his hand, who is concerned to uphold and render happy the creatures which he hath made. The earth abounds in fruitfulness, the air with salubrity; the clouds drop down fatness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. Fire and hail, and winds and seas, contribute to our welfare; we inhale life with every breath we draw, and all the elements are employed for our sustenance and happiness.

Look we to instruments as well as means? affectionate parents have supplied us, during our childhood and youth——ways have been opened for our future support——endearing connexions formed which have proved a source of much enjoyment——in seasons of difficulty, friends have kindly assisted us——supplies have reached us from quarters least expected. Yet what are all these but the opening of the divine hand!

III. IMPROVE the subject.

There is no divine truth but what is pregnant with important consequences; and this will be found not a little fruitful——

1. If such be the bounty of divine providence, what obligations do we lie under; and what actual returns have we made for all this goodness? All that he requires is our gratitude and devotion: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. But alas, are there not many of you who are this day his enemies? That a Being so supreme in goodness should have an enemy, is truly awful; yet so it is. The worst thing said of one of the worst men was, 'he did eat at my table, and hath lifted up his heel against me'——in providing for the wants of rebellious men, God hath been feeding a generation of vipers, which under the frost of childhood or adversity, seemed to claim his compassionate regard, but which under the sunshine of maturer years and prosperous circumstances, do not fail to cast forth their venom, and recoil upon their benefactor——These things must come into account another day: the divine goodness towards us, and our abuse of it, will all be brought to light, when the secrets of every heart shall be revealed.

2. From this view of the divine beneficence, we are encouraged to trust in the Lord amidst all our wants and difficulties.—With what ease can He supply our need. In how many ways unknown to us and unexpected by us, can he give a favourable turn to our affairs! "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou

shalt be fed. Young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." Psal. xxxiv. 10. xxxvii. 3.

3. If such be the bounty of providence, how rich must be the provision of grace?—If this be the opening of his hand, that is the opening of his heart. If he satisfies natural desires, much more those which are spiritual. "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and save them." That which is done only generally in the one case, is done universally in the other. Not one soul shall perish through want or famine, whose desires terminate on Christ—While therefore we cherish gratitude for temporal mercies, let us not rest satisfied in them. God gave to Nebuchadnezzar all the kingdoms of the earth. See how light he makes of earthly good, to bestow it on the basest of men; to throw it away as it were on his worst enemies. Do not be content with the king of Babylon's portion; but rather covet with Jabez to be blessed 'indeed.' Worldly good, though a blessing in itself, may through sin be turned into a curse—

4. If God be thus good, what must sin be, that arms itself against him, and despises all his goodness.—Is it not for this that he has filled the earth with misery, and threatened man with the wrath to come? How great that evil which can incense even goodness itself with anger, and arm it with the vengeance of eternal fire—Sin is not merely opposed to the authority and majesty of God, which it dares to treat with contempt; it is also directed against all that is amiable in moral beauty, all that is awful in goodness; and herein its malignity is indelible—

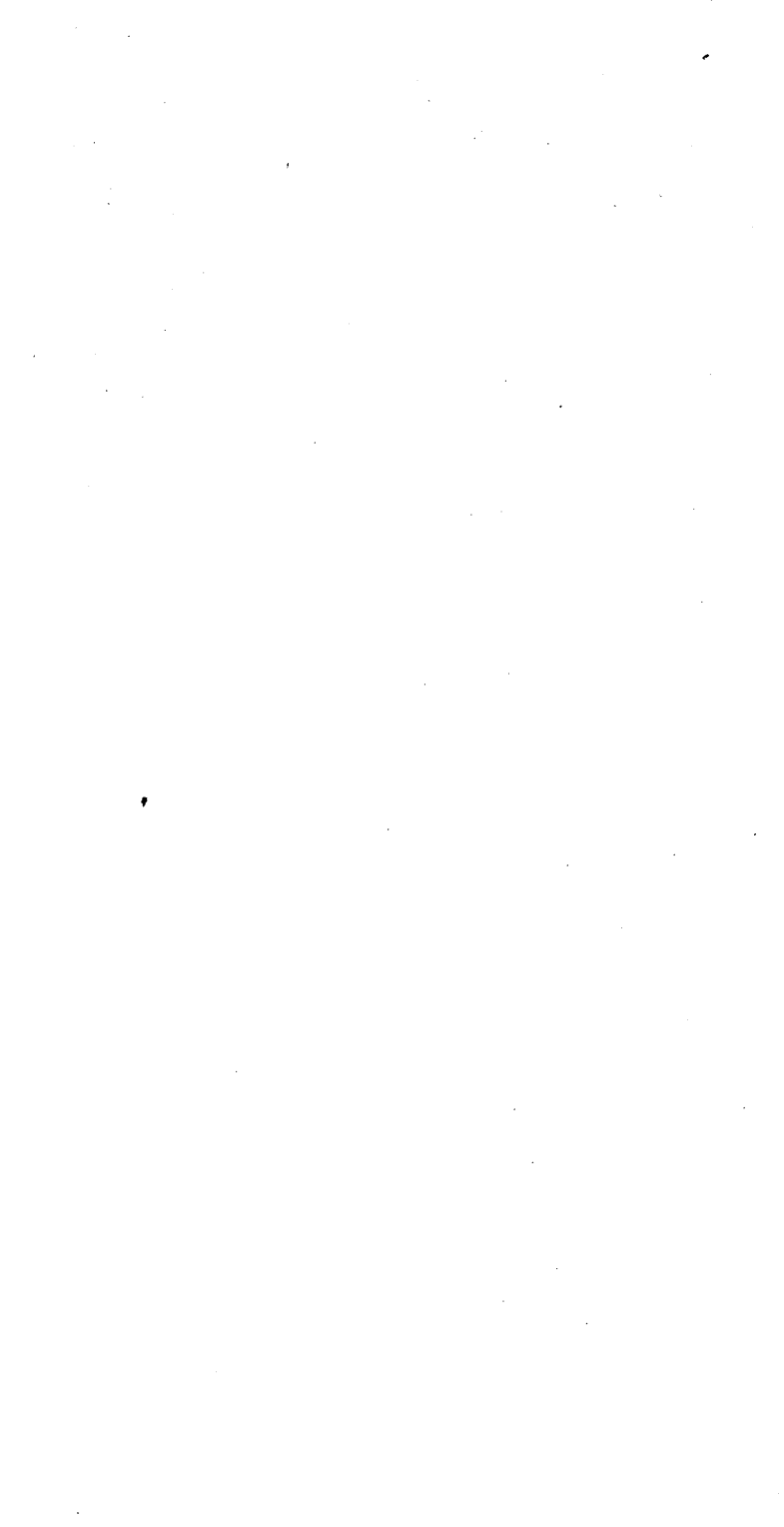
5. If God can with such ease supply the whole creation, how great and inestimable must be the redemption of his Son.—For the one he has only to open his hand, and the work is done: the other must be accomplished by the blood of the cross. The wisdom and the power of God are all-sufficient in one case as well as in another; but there are things relative to moral government which he cannot do. He cannot deny himself. Had it been possible, in the redemption of sinners, God would have spared his own Son, and the cup should have passed from him; but 'it became him,' in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering—

6. The subject suggests the most powerful of all motives for kindness and charity towards the poor and needy.—If we be the children of God, our conduct must resemble his; and while he so bountifully supplies our wants, he may well say to us as he did to Israel of old, 'Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt open thy hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.' Our Lord gives a similar charge to his disciples, saying, 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.' Deut. xv. 7—12. Matt. v. 45—48.

The above specimen exhibits only one of the various modes of composition, where a *topic* is selected as the foundation of a discourse; but

it may serve as an example of all the rest, *unity of design* being the principal object, by whatever means it may be attained. Some subjects may require a *mixed* mode of treatment, consisting partly of exposition, and partly of topical discussion, especially where a degree of obscurity arises, either from the nature of the doctrine, or the terms in which it is expressed. Various instances of this kind will occur in the following Sketches, which it is presumed are better adapted to afford effectual assistance, than any abstract rules that might be given.

Those however who wish to pursue this inquiry, and to become acquainted with the different methods of constructing a discourse, will meet with ample information in 'Claude's Essay on the composition of a Sermon,' as well as from other publications of subordinate merit. The design of the present performance is not so much to lay down rules, as to furnish examples, illustrative of the principles so repeatedly inculcated by other writers.



SKETCHES OF SERMONS.

THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY.

Preaching peace by Jesus Christ.—Acts x. 36.

A very interesting account is given in this chapter of Cornelius, a Roman officer, who is described as a good man; yet Peter must be sent to tell him words, whereby he and his house should be saved. Cornelius believed according to the light he had, but needed to be taught the way of the Lord more perfectly.

It is pleasing to see the concurrence of events, intended to bring this stranger to the faith of Jesus, and to open a door for preaching the gospel among the gentiles. Cornelius is warned to send for Peter, and at the same time Peter has a vision to prepare his mind, and direct his way to Cornelius. When he arrives at Cesarea, he finds the family and their neighbours assembled to hear the word, and he immediately opens his commission by preaching to them the gospel of peace.

Let us consider the import of the apostolic doctrine—and attempt an improvement of the subject.

I. The summary given of the gospel ministry.

It consists in “preaching peace by Jesus Christ,” or reconciliation by the blood of the cross. Ephes. ii. 14—17.

This doctrine implies three things—

1. That the gospel finds us at variance with God.—Man was once at peace with his Maker—sin has destroyed it has made a breach wide as the sea separated chief friends—placed man at an infinite distance from his Maker filled the world with confusion and misery.

In this, we are the aggressors have joined Satan in his rebellion are become enemies by wicked works and God is turned to be our enemy. Col. i. 21. Isai. lxiii. 10.

The nature of this breach is dreadful; it does not consist in a partial or temporary disagreement, but in a total and perpetual alienation. Rom. viii. 7. We were originally children, but are become aliens, and can be treated only as rebels. The regard which God bears to his creatures must be inconceivable, but sin as it were extinguished his paternal goodness. Gen. vi. 6, 7. Isai. xxvii. 11.

Hence all the threatenings and curses denounced against man, which are but the beginning of sorrow. Deut. xxviii. 16—19. Gal. iii. 10.

Such is the state in which the gospel finds us, and that not the profligate only, but all men without distinction.

The apostolic message also implies,

2. That all the means which men have devised for appeasing the divine anger are utterly insufficient for that purpose, and tend only to make the breach still wider.—Some indeed scorn the very idea of seeking peace with God, and seem to bid defiance to his threatenings. Exod. v. 2.

Others flatter themselves that they shall have peace, though they add drunkenness to thirst.—Those who try to appease him, have always erred; substituting their own devices instead of his institutions, and making void the only way of peace. Isai. lxxv. 2, 3.

Such has been the conduct of the idolatrous heathen, who by their sanguinary rites have increased the anger of God against them.

The Jews who offered the appointed sacrifices, but not as they were commanded, have produced the same effect, so that God abhorred them, and also his own appointments. Isai. lxxvi. 3. Heb. x. 6.

Others who have reformed their conduct, and become devout, have made a merit of it, and thereby added to their former iniquities.

What has philosophy done towards healing the awful breach between God and man and what have the various religions of the world done?—Nothing worse than nothing.

God is not to be appeased by us, by any thing we can do or suffer.

Sin is too great an evil to be thus removed the offence too great to be forgiven on the ground of confession merely, let the confession be ever so sincere—Without shedding of blood there is no remission; but the blood of bulls and of goats cannot take away sin.

All duties done therefore with this design are infinitely displeasing in the sight of God; and instead of appeasing, tend only to enflame his wrath.

The gospel expressly declares,

3. That the only way of peace being made between God and man, is “by Jesus Christ.” He hath made peace by the blood of his cross; and on this leading fact, every part of true religion is made to depend. Rom. iii. 25. Ephs. ii. 13—15. 1 Tim. i. 15. 1 John v. 11.

The great difficulty is now removed, and reconciliation is proclaimed in the name of Jesus. 2 Cor. v. 19—21.

The evidences of this great fact are abundant. Having brought up Christ from the dead, he is now the God of peace. Rom. iv. 25. Heb. xiii. 20.

Eternal life is promised to all that believe in him, and there is now no condemnation. John iii. 36. Rom. v. 1. viii. 1.—God holds communion with them as the God of peace, and will eventually destroy all their enemies. Phil. iv. 9. Rom. xvi. 20.

II. Improvement of the subject.

1. We are hence taught in what manner to answer that greatest of all inquiries, How is our peace to be made with God. Many when

they come to die are anxious on this subject, and think to make all up by prayers, devotions, and reformation; and to this they are often directed by their blind guides. But this is not to seek forgiveness through the blood of the cross, and it is that only can procure peace with God. Matt. xi. 28. Rom. v. 10.

All that is necessary on our part is to acquiesce in what Christ has done, to believe in him, and seek mercy in his name. This is the great lesson we have to learn, and this the only way of peace and rest.

2. We see the great importance of the gospel, and how essential it is to the salvation and happiness of mankind.—It is the dove with its olive branch, proclaiming peace to a guilty world.—What blessing can be compared to peace with God, in life and in death.

3. How unreasonable and inexcusable is all opposition to such a gospel. What do those mean, who oppose its salutary influence, or treat it with contempt. Or those who hear the gospel, and yet do not embrace it. Yet how many sit under its sound, and die at last in a state of enmity with God.

4. What tempers and dispositions ought to characterise the professors of such a gospel.—How ready to forgive, where so much has been forgiven. How pure, how peaceable, how easy to be entreated and how inconsistent are all angry disputes about such a peaceable religion. Gal. v. 22, 23. James iii. 17, 18.

MINISTERIAL FIDELITY.

From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that is the three and twentieth year, the word of the Lord hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened.—Jeremiah xxv. 3.*

Jeremiah had already been sent to the house of the king, chap. xxii. 1; and now he is sent to "all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;" but it was substantially the same message. He did not threaten the poor, and flatter the great, but denounced God's awful judgments against both. He lived in evil and perilous times, when a man was made an offender for a word, yet he was faithful in his work. His life was often in danger, yet he still persisted in delivering his message, and was greatly supported from above. Chap. xxxi.

* The venerable Preacher observes, in his MS. Notes on this text, the singular coincidence of dates, between his own ministry and that of the prophet Jeremiah! "I was struck," says he, "with the application of this passage to my own case, as I read it in my family. This is the 23d year of my ministry, from the 13th year of George II., and I have great reason to lament the want of success, as well as the weeping prophet."

Considering Jeremiah as an example of Ministerial fidelity, let us attend to the following observations—

I. An intimate acquaintance with the mind of God in his word, is essential to the Ministerial character.

Though ordinary ministers do not partake of the Spirit of inspiration, like the prophet Jeremiah, yet they must all be taught of God.——
 “The word of the Lord” may be said to “*come*” to those who have a right to dispense it: it is not so much the fruit of their labour, as of the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Rom. x. 7, 8. The word of inspiration “*came*” to Jeremiah in the dungeon, chap. xxxvii. 17; and to John in the wilderness, Luke iii. 2. It also came to Hosea, in a manner which denotes the intimate converse that God had with the spirit of his servant in the work of the ministry. Hos. i. 1. He delivered nothing to the people, but what he had first received. God spake to his heart, and he then endeavoured to speak to theirs.

It is happy when ministers have an inward evidence, that what they say is from God, and according to the Scriptures; and it affords additional satisfaction, when they can leave a testimony upon the hearts of the people to the same purpose. It is a powerful motive to obedience, to be assured that it is the word of the Lord that is spoken. When men set reason against reason, and opinion against opinion, it prevails not; but when the word is attended with divine authority, it awes the mind into deep submission.

Though ministers themselves may be inferior to those who attend upon their ministry, yet the word of the Lord is superior to all. It overcomes the most inveterate opposition, silences sinful doubts and fears, and controls the most powerful temptations. Hence it is that faithful ministers cannot but preach, when they are sent of God. Woe is me, says Paul, if I preach not the gospel. His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, says the prophet; I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. Jer. xx. 9. 1 Cor. ix. 16.

II. In order to adorn the character of a minister, it is necessary that he be obedient and diligent in his work.

1. He must be *obedient*. The word of the Lord hath come unto me, saith the prophet, “and I have spoken unto you.” So when Paul was called to preach Christ among the heathen, he consulted not with flesh and blood, but immediately entered upon his work. Gal. i. 15—17. Had he consulted his worldly ease, or honour, or reputation, or his carnal friends and relations, they would have said, as Peter did to Christ, Master, spare thyself. “But he whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God.” John iii. 34. When God speaks, and what he speaks, ministers should speak. As long as he has a message to send, they should be willing to carry it, and should keep close to their instructions. They are required to deliver that which they have received of the Lord, and their doctrine should not be their own, but his that sent them. Jer. xxiii. 28. 1 Thess. iv. 15.

2. He must be *diligent* in his work. Jeremiah not only delivered the word of the Lord to the people, but he did it, "rising early and speaking." We read of some who rise up early to pursue their worldly gain, and of others who rise up early to drink strong drink; but the prophet was early and laborious in communicating the mind and will of God to an ignorant and perverse people. He did it carefully and earnestly, as one that would lose no time. He preached early in the morning, when the people were sober-minded, and most likely to be attentive. Early with respect to the judgments that were impending, and which were yet at a distance; so that by a national repentance and reformation, there might yet be a possibility of escaping them.

Ministers have no time to be idle, but should be incessantly laborious. Acts. xx. 31. As no danger could subdue the courage of the apostle Paul, so neither could the ignorance or unbelief of his hearers weary out his patience: he still hoped, that some time or other he might prevail with them to embrace the truth. The faithful minister, so far from wanting work for his time, complains of nothing so much as the want of time and strength for his work. He has always something to do for God, in the closet, in the pulpit, or amongst his people; and therefore has no need to seek for amusements, or to intermeddle with the affairs of other men.

III. The most diligent and faithful servants of the Lord, have not always been successful.

Jeremiah himself was an instance of this. I have spoken unto you—"but ye have not hearkened." The people of Judah were incorrigible, amidst all his warnings, and treated both him and his doctrine with contempt. They have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them? Jer. viii. 9.

1. Let us here notice what is implied in *hearkening* to the word of the Lord.

(1) It supposes a calm and composed frame of spirit, when God is speaking to us by his word. Psal. xlv. 10. The person who hearkens must himself be silent. Zech. ii. 13. Leave it to the Lord to take his own way, and neither prescribe to him what he should do, nor how he should teach. Job xiii. 5, 6.

(2) Patient attention is required, in hearkening to the voice of his word. Men feel disgust at being slighted when they speak; much more is God dishonoured by our inattention. Whether he speaks good words and comfortable words, or whether he speaks roughly, by terrible things in righteousness, it becomes us to hearken patiently, and with deep attention. Psal. lxxxi. 8—10. Rev. iii. 20. We must not turn away offended, as Christ's hearers did, with, This is a hard saying, who can hear it. John vi. 60. Much less indulge in rancour and opposition, like the hearers of Stephen and of Paul. Acts vii. 54. xxii. 22. As God exercises patience in treating with us, and ministers in speaking his word, we are required to hear with patience what is said, both by the one and the other.

(3) It implies a holy waiting and expectation, as to what the Lord may yet have to say to us. In this manner Job's auditors revered his wisdom, chap. xxix. 21—23: much more does it become us to cherish such a disposition, when God is speaking to us by his word, Psal. lxxxv. 8.

Many hear, but do not "hearken;" for this implies submission and obedience. They say unto the Almighty, Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. They are like the deaf adder; they keep their hearts shut against all the calls of God's providence, and all the remonstrances of his holy word. Psal. lviii. 4, 5. None are so blind as those that will not see, and none so deaf as those that will not hear. Matt. xiii. 14, 15.

2. Inquire, why it is that unbelievers *will not hearken* to the voice of God in his word.

(1) Because the things spoken are unwelcome and disagreeable: the word of the Lord is against them. Zeph. ii. 5. Both the duties of the law, and the doctrines of the gospel, are contrary to flesh and blood, and offensive to the carnal mind. God requires too much to be renounced by the proud and self-sufficient, too much to be done by the indolent and slothful. He wants an easy religion, and would be glad to waft his soul to heaven by a wish, and to inherit the promises without the labour of either faith or patience. When Jeremiah's hearers hoped that the message of the prophet would correspond with their inclinations, they promised to hearken and become obedient. chap. xlii. 6. But when they found it to be otherwise, they spoke quite a different language, and would not bear to be contradicted. chap. xliii. 2.

(2) It is owing to the want of a right spirit, which renewing grace only can impart. Sinners are naturally deaf to divine things, and cannot hear; they are voluntarily so, and will not hear. Isai. liii. 1. Our eyes are wilfully shut against the light, and our ears to the sound of the gospel; and it is Christ alone that can say to both, "Ephraim, be ye opened." Though ministers lift up their voice like a trumpet, and though God thunders as he once did from Mount Sinai, yet sinners will not hear till their ears be circumcised, and their hearts renewed. Wisdom will not enter till knowledge becomes pleasant to the soul.

(3.) The attention of carnal minds is directed to other objects, though of little moment in comparison of those things which they presume to neglect and despise. Like Martha, they are cumbered with much serving, when they ought to be sitting at the Redeemer's feet. The cares of this world choke the word, even when it is sown in the heart. The busy and the alluring scenes of life draw off the attention from spiritual objects, and the indulgence of the flesh cause the interests of the soul to be neglected. Pride and idleness and fulness of bread caused the men of Sodom to disregard the warning of Lot, when he was grieved at their filthy conversation, and anxious to avert impending judgments. Thus when God calls to a participation of spiritual blessings, the language of sinners is, "We have loved idols, and after them we will go." Jer. ii. 25. They have loved their lusts, and them they must and will fulfil, whatever be the consequence. The delights and pleasures of the present world are what they relish; and as to the spiritual banquet, they leave it to dreaming visionaries, and despise it as heartily as Esau did his birth-right.

(4) After a long course of iniquity and grievous provocation, men are given up to the righteous dereliction of God, and Satan is permitted to blind their minds and harden their hearts against the truth, and they become incorrigible. Isai. vi. 10. That word which is the means of softening some, hardens others, till at length they become sermon proof, and the most awful representations have no more effect upon them than thunder upon the deaf, or lightning upon the totally blind. Men first harden themselves, and then God gives them up to the hardness which they have chosen: hence it is that the most faithful and diligent ministers often labour comparatively in vain. Neh. ix. 29. Psal. lxxxi. 11, 12.

IV. The Lord keeps an account of all the slights, that he has received from impenitent sinners, though they may think but little of it.

“From the thirteenth year of Josiah, the son of Amon the king of Judah, even unto this day, that is the three and twentieth year”—I have spoken unto you, but ye have not hearkened. So again: “these three years I come seeking fruit, and find none,” Luke xiii. 7. All that time had Christ laboured for nought, and stretched forth his hands to a gainsaying and rebellious people.—Also of their forefathers it is said, “Forty years long was I grieved with that generation.” Psal. xcv. 10, 11. The Lord knows how long we have enjoyed the means of grace, how long we have sat under the sound of the gospel, and derived no advantage from it; and the account will one day be laid open. Let the following things therefore be well remembered—

1. If we do not hearken to God’s word, our prayers will become an abomination, and he will not hear us in the day of trouble. Prov. i. 24—28. xxviii. 9. Zech. vii. 12—14. The rich man in torments begged to be heard, but was denied. Luke xvi. 24, 25.

2. If we refuse to hearken unto God’s word, he may justly take it away from us. Amos viii. 11, 12. Their souls despised the light bread, and God will give them no more of the hidden manna. They slighted the prophets while they had them, and they shall wish them in vain when they are removed from them. Ezek. vii. 26. The kingdom of heaven shall be taken away from the unbelieving Jews, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. Matt. xui. 43. If the church of Ephesus repent not, the candlestick shall be removed out of its place. Rev. ii. 5.

3. If we do not hearken to the divine word, all other means will be ineffectual. Luke xvi. 31. The gospel is the appointed medium of salvation, it is God’s last remedy for a ruined world: and those who are not recovered by it, must perish without remedy. None are in such perilous circumstances, as those to whom it is not a savour of life unto life. 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

4. That word which we now despise shall judge us at the last day. John xii. 48. Rom. ii. 16. Oh what a fearful account will some have to give of sermons slighted, disregarded and forgotten. Prov. v. 11—14.

INCORRIGIBLE HEARERS.

And the Lord sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear.—Jeremiah xxv. 4.

This is mentioned by Jeremiah as an additional aggravation of the guilt of the people of Judah, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that they had not only rejected his ministry, but the ministry of all his predecessors and contemporaries in the sacred office. They had laboured in vain, and spent their strength for nought; but God would require it at the hands of that incorrigible people, and visit them with his threatened indignation.

We shall first offer a few general observations on the text—and then apply the subject to ourselves.

I. Attend to a few General Observations.

1. We here see that God often multiplies the means of grace to those who neglect and despise them.—Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk, prophesied a little before the time of Jeremiah, and Zephaniah was his contemporary. Besides these, there might be several others of less distinction; and they were all inspired to preach repentance to Israel, and the remission of their sins. The Lord raised up a succession of prophets, that they might have here a little, and there a little, and that in the mouth of so many witnesses, every word might be established. Isai. xxviii. 10. Psal. lxxviii. 11. Matt. xxii. 1—7.

2. All these prophets were sent on the same errand, were inspired by the same Spirit, and all spake the same thing; ver. 5, 6.—God's ministering servants all act in concert: there was a perfect agreement between Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles. And notwithstanding the minor differences that may exist amongst uninspired teachers of the present day, yet all the real ministers of Christ are fully agreed in the fundamental principles of the gospel, and with one mouth they glorify God. There may also be a great variety in their gifts and acquirements, in their mode of worship, and in the manner of exhibiting divine truths; yet their mission and their teaching is substantially the same. 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6. xv. 11. 1 John i. 1.

3. God, in sending his ministers, acts like one in good earnest—"rising up early and sending them." If the prophets rose early in the morning, and addressed the people before the labours of the day commenced, it was the Lord who prompted their diligence, and inspired them with zeal and courage for their work; and to his compassion for the perishing condition of the people, all that vigilance is to be ascribed.

Even faithful ministers, labouring under repeated discouragements, are apt to become dull and drowsy in their work; the Lord therefore is beautifully represented as waking and calling them up, and giving them a message to the people. Isai. l. 4. Time is short, the

work is all-important, and requires the utmost diligence and care. Luke x. 4.

4. Though all the messages were of the same import, they did not produce the desired effect—"Ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear."

(1) They were not at all inquisitive to know their duty, or what the Lord required of them.—Holy truths are as pleasant to the regenerate soul, as melodious sounds are to a musical ear, or as food is to the hungry. Jer. xv. 16. Psal. cxix. 20. But to the carnally-minded it is far otherwise: if they seem to hear, yet they turn away their ear from the truth. Zech. vii. 11.

(2) Not wishing to know their duty, neither were they disposed to perform it.—Inclining the ear to hear shews a disposition to obedience, and is one of the first indications of true religion. Psal. xlv. 10. Isai. lv. 3. Acts xvi. 14. To be willing and obedient, is the way to inherit the land: but the wicked and incorrigible are utterly averse. 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8. Their hearts are like adamant, and their necks as an iron sinew. Isai. xlviii. 18. Uncircumcised in heart and ears, they cannot hearken, and the word of the Lord is to them a reproach. Jer. vi. 10.

II. Apply the subject to ourselves.

1. We learn from hence, the dreadful corruption of human nature.—To what else can we attribute this general and prevailing indifference to the word of God? The great things of his law, and the still more glorious things of the gospel, are accounted as strange things. Hos. viii. 12. God hath spoken once, yea twice, but man regarded it not. Job xxxiii. 14—16. The more pure and precious any discovery of God is, the more it is disrelished by a carnal world. Luke xiv. 18. If at any time a conviction of the truth is felt, every effort is made to stifle and confound it. Acts xxii. 43.

2. Let our depravity be what it may, the word of the Lord shall have its effect; it shall not return void or empty.—If it be not a savour of life unto life, it will be of death unto death. Isai. lv. 11. 2 Cor. ii. 16. Not one word of what the Lord has spoken shall fall to the ground. 1 Sam. ii. 25. Beware then that ye put it not from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life. Acts xiii. 46.

3. A hard and impenitent heart, in rejecting the gospel, is the most awful of all judgments in the present life, and the forerunner of final perdition.—A distressed and wounded conscience, agonized with a sense of guilt, and a fearful apprehension of judgment, is not so much to be dreaded as a hard unfeeling heart. This it was that grieved the blessed Saviour, and that perverts the whole design of his mediation. Mark iii. 5. Rom. ii. 4, 5.

4. If we hear not God speaking to us in a way of mercy now, we shall be compelled to hear his voice in a way of vengeance. He will speak to us in his wrath, and vex us in his sore displeasure. Psal. l. 21. Isai. lxvi. 4. Zech. vii. 12.

CHARACTER AND TRANSLATION OF ENOCH.

Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.—
Genesis v. 24.

Some walk in a vain show, and vanity will be their reward. Others walk after the flesh, and of the flesh they shall reap corruption. Here we have one of an opposite character, a wiser traveller, who trod the best path, and met with a most blessed issue. The conduct of Enoch while in the world, and his departure out of it, were both extraordinary, and are particularly worthy of attention.

I. Observe the course which Enoch pursued: "He walked with God."

1. He was a man of eminent piety, having communion and fellowship with God, and taking him for his companion and his guide through life. Nothing of this kind is said of those who went before him, or who followed after, till we come to the life of Noah. Many of his contemporaries were no doubt religious characters; but Enoch excelled them all, and had this *special* testimony, that he pleased God. Heb. xi. 5, 6.

He must have had those failings and infirmities which are incident to the present state, yet we find no evil charged upon him, as upon Noah, Lot, David, Peter, and many others, who have been distinguished for their piety. Enoch's intercourse with heaven was more uninterrupted, his life more calm and serene, his whole conduct more circumspect and pure. He was altogether a great character, and exhibited much of the life and power of true religion. He was also endued with the Spirit of prophecy, and the secret of the Lord was with him. Like Noah he was a preacher of righteousness, and a pattern of faith and holiness. Much of Christ was revealed to him: he saw his day afar off, and foretold his second coming. Jude 11.

2. Enoch commenced his religious course in what was then the early part of life, in the sixty-fifth year of his age, and amidst the duties and enjoyments of domestic life: ver. 21, 22. He began truly to live when men now begin to die. The work of conversion generally takes place in the season of youth, for God desires the first-ripe fruit, Micah vii. 1; but this is not the case with all. Abraham was called in his old age, and Zacheus appears to have been brought to the knowledge of Christ in the decline of life; but it is better late than never. Divine grace can save aged sinners, can exterminate inveterate habits, and mortify old corruptions.

Nor was it necessary to Enoch's walking with God that he should retire from the world, or live the life of a solitary hermit, any more than it was for Adam to be shut up alone in paradise, to hold daily communion with his Maker. Gen. ii. 18. It was in the bosom of his family that Enoch maintained the most delightful intercourse with heaven, in his family, where all the social virtues thrive, and before his numerous sons and daughters he walked

with a perfect heart. Psal. ci. 2. Oh what a lovely instance of domestic piety!

3. Enoch continued this heavenly career, with undeviating steps, for the long period of three hundred years. Polycarp could say, when led to martyrdom, 'Eighty and five years have I served my Master, and he never did me any harm;' but Enoch could look back on a much longer period, with unspeakable satisfaction. As long as he could walk, he walked with God, steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. This is the very height and strength of religion. Oh happy man, what an acquaintance must he have had with God, during such a tract of time.

4. He maintained this course amidst the aboundings of iniquity, and innumerable temptations to depart from God. It was a dark day, and a degenerate age in which he lived. It was near the time of the flood, when 'all flesh had corrupted their way;' and this made his character shine the brighter. It is a great mercy to be good in good times, but it is a singular mercy to be so in bad times. Mal. iii. 16. And it is mentioned to the honour of the early Christians, that they followed the Lamb, while all the world was wondering after the beast. Rev. xiii. 3.

II. Notice his happy departure: "He was not, for God took him."

1. He was not.—Not indeed that he no longer existed, for man was made for immortality. Death alters the circumstances of our *being*, but does not terminate our existence. Enoch was, and he was not; that is, he was not on earth, not to be seen and conversed with as formerly. The place that had known him, knew him now no more. Job. vii. 10. 2 Kings ii. 12. Those who die are no longer to be seen in the field, in the family, or in the sanctuary: death is a farewell, a final departure from all those places which used to be frequented. Thus Paul speaks of his own death. 2 Tim. iv. 6. Enoch's departure was so sudden and unexpected, that his friends could scarcely believe that he was gone; they therefore sought for him, as in the case of Elijah, but 'he was not found.' Heb. xi. 5. Had this been all that was said of him, we should scarcely have known what became of him, for he was neither dead nor buried; but revelation gives us the reason of his absence—

2. For God took him.—This short and expressive form of speech may include the following particulars—

(1) God took him from amongst men. Possibly he had been slighted and despised, his counsels and predictions rejected by an evil generation; and God took him out of the reach of all his enemies.

(2) He was taken from the scene of his labours, that he might enter into rest, and that his works might follow him. Rev. xiv. 13. He had laboured hard with a corrupt and degenerate world, who refused to be reformed, and God would take him away from the evil to come, when the waters should overflow the earth. Jude 14, 15.

(3) He was taken from a state of imperfection, to be made perfect in glory; for though he walked with God, he still carried about with him

a body of sin and death. Rom. vii. 24. When the body dies, or puts on incorruption, sin no longer lives in a true believer. Converting grace destroys the dominion of sin, and death its existence. Rom. vi. 7. Heb. xii. 23.

(4) God took him to himself, to his house and home, to his arms and to his bosom, to his immediate presence, and the full enjoyment of himself, and to an innumerable company of angels. John xiv. 2, 3. 1 Thess. iv. 17.

(5) He was taken away in the midst of his days, in his full strength; for though he lived much longer than men do now, yet his life was short when compared with others of the antediluvian patriarchs. His father, and his son, lived almost to thrice his age. He was soon ripe for heaven, and the best are often removed first. Isai. lvii. 1. John xiv. 28.

(6) Enoch was removed suddenly, and at once. God generally takes away his people gradually, loosening the pins of the earthly tabernacle by slow degrees, that death may make its advances step by step. Psal. cii. 2, 3. Eccles. xii. 3. Death generally has its harbingers, giving notice of its approach; but it was not so with regard to Enoch. According to the ordinary course of nature, he might have lived some hundreds of years longer; but like Moses he was called away before his eye was dim, or his natural strength abated. Deut. xxxiv. 7.

(7) God took him away altogether, without the ordinary process of dissolution. When the wicked die their soul is required of them. Luke xii. 20. And when good men die, they adopt the language of David: 'Into thy hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.' Psal. xxxi. 5. Thus it was with the martyr Stephen, and also with the blessed Saviour. Acts vii. 59. Luke xxiii. 46. But it was not so with Enoch: he suffered no dissolution: God took him, body and soul together, and left nothing but his sins. There are now several glorified bodies in heaven: Enoch, Elijah, and perhaps Moses, besides the glorious body of Christ; and it is probable, the bodies of those saints who left their tombs at his resurrection. Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

(8) Enoch had the singular honour of being translated, from earth to heaven, by an immediate divine interposition, for "God" took him. He did not tread the common path to glory; none went the same way before him, and but one since. Of all his predecessors it is said, they lived so long, and then died; but Enoch descended not to the house appointed for all living, neither did his flesh see corruption. Instead of tasting death, he did not so much as see it; but was totally exempt from that bitter cup. An escort of angels, instead of the last enemy, were sent to convey him to his Father's house. But as flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, a change equivalent to that of the resurrection passed upon him, during his passage thither. 1 Cor. xv. 50, 51. Such a glorious change may appear desirable, 2 Cor. v. 4; but it is not to be expected. Psal. lxxxix. 48.

From the whole we see, that we must walk with God here, if we hope to dwell with him hereafter. That God can give extraordinary rewards for extraordinary services. And that heaven is open to all believers.

HONOUR AND PRIVILEGE OF THE SAINTS.

But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself.
 Psalm. iv. 3.

David's greatest troubles were on account of his religion, though he was not without trouble in other respects. He was persecuted for his piety; and his elevation to the throne of Israel raised him up many enemies who were inclined to dispute his right. But he intimates that he did not usurp the government: it was God that anointed him king over Israel, and who set him apart for that purpose. In vindicating his own claims, he asserts the honour and the privilege of all the saints—that God hath set them apart for himself.

Let us notice the character here given of the saints—and the privilege with which it is connected.

I. Illustrate the character in the text, or inquire what it is to be truly "godly."

Godliness is that which immediately relates to God: it has him for its object, and in it we are made partakers of a divine nature.

True religion is by the apostle distributed into three parts, corresponding with the precepts of the moral law, which require us to love God, our neighbours, and ourselves. Titus ii. 12. To live 'soberly,' concerns ourselves, and consists in the government of the passions.

To live 'righteously,' respects our conduct towards others, and consists in our doing to them as we should wish they would do unto us. To live 'godly,' refers to our conduct towards God, and consists in making him the object of our veneration. The two former may exist without the latter, but the latter cannot be without the former.

More particularly,

1. To be godly is to be like God to imitate his moral character, and to bear a resemblance to it to think, and act, and feel, in some measure, as he does to be of one mind with him, in the great principles of moral government. God is necessarily the friend of holiness, and the enemy of sin; to be godly is to be the same, according to our measure, hating the evil and choosing the good.

God is infinitely kind and merciful; he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works: and it is essential to true godliness that we be pitiful, kind and courteous, full of compassion, and gracious. Psal. cxii. 4. Matt. v. 44, 45. James i. 27. God also is ready to forgive, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and in truth: to be godly is to be like him, and to possess the same spirit.

2. To be truly godly is to live in the fear of God to walk as in his sight to have a special regard to his presence seeking his approbation in all things. Not only to conduct ourselves wisely before men, but to walk before the Lord with a perfect heart. Hence that command to Abraham, Gen. xvii. 1. and this only is true religion.

3. Godliness consists in making the will of God the rule of our life, the reason and motive of our obedience.

It is not merely what we do in religion, but why we do it, that makes it acceptable in the sight of God. If we read, or hear, or pray, and do all this from custom, or the force of example only, it is not godliness.

We may abound in religious observances; but if we have no regard to the will of God, it is no better than will-worship.

Hence that serious interrogation: 'Did ye do it unto me, even unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts.' Zech. vii. 5.

4. It is to make the glory of God the end of all we do there is no godliness without this.

If we repent of sin merely on account of its consequences, as affecting ourselves, it is not sorrowing after a godly sort.

Love to God is not genuine, unless it has the excellence of his character for its object.

True godliness feels for the glory of God, and is deeply interested in its advancement.

5. If we be godly, we shall seek communion with God shall delight in secret duties, in drawing near to him, and displaying all our heart before him.

Much intercourse with heaven is essential to the life and power of true religion.

6. To be godly is to make the enjoyment of God our chief portion, our ultimate bliss

relinquishing every other object in comparison of this

making his friendship our all in all, and desiring his loving-kindness as better than life. This only is true godliness.

II. Consider the privileges of the godly: "the Lord hath set him apart for himself."

1. They are "set apart," as the first-born of Israel, and their first-fruits, by being devoted to the Lord

as the whole nation of Israel, who were chosen to be a peculiar people; or as the tribe of Levi, who were to be the Lord's inheritance.

(1) This consecration is accomplished by effectual calling, 'being chosen from the beginning, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.'

All that are truly godly are chosen out of the world, separated from the world, and ordained that they should bring forth fruit. John xv. 16.

(2) They are also set apart in a way of providence, and God has a special regard to them in all his dispensations.

Though he will make an end of his enemies, he will not make a full end of them.

When he destroyed the old world, he set apart Noah for himself; and when Sodom was consumed, he did the same by Lot.

2. It is not without design that the godly are thus distinguished The Lord hath set them apart "for himself."

(1) That he may be glorified 'This people have I formed for myself, that they may show forth my praise.'

They are God's witnesses before the world, to testify of the goodness of his government,

and the exceeding riches of his grace to give evidence of his truth and faithfulness, and of the efficacy of the blood of Christ.

(2) That they may be finally saved, and become his everlasting portion. They are his, and he will set them apart in the last day, from the rest

of the ungodly world then he will gather up his treasure, and burn up the wicked as stubble. Mal. iii. 17.

Let sinners "know" this, that however they may treat the godly in this life, God is their friend, and he will delight in them to do them good.

Let the godly themselves "know" it for their comfort, and be assured that they are placed under divine protection.

THE SIN OF MOSES AND AARON.

Ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel.—Deuteronomy xxxii. 51.

The death of Moses was attended with a variety of affecting circumstances. He was arrived indeed at a good old age, when he was directed to go up and die on Mount Nebo; but he was at the same time in a vigorous state of health. Deut. xxxiv. 7. He had also spent nearly a third of his time in a very arduous employment, and now expected to have reaped the fruit of all his labours, by entering into the holy land. He might have pleaded as David did, to see the good of God's chosen, and to glory with his inheritance. Psal. cvi. 4, 5. But another must inherit the honour of perfecting his achievements, and he, not one of his posterity. When Aaron died, Eleazar his son ministered in his stead; and when David died, Solomon his son inherited the glory; but when Moses is called away, he had no son to sustain the dignity of his office, but Joshua his servant is appointed his successor. He must also die under the tokens of divine displeasure, the reason of which is mentioned in the text: "Because ye transgressed against me."

Let us first notice the alleged Offence;—and then, the Instruction which this subject may afford.

I. Consider the sin committed by Moses and Aaron, for they were both involved in the same offence.

1. It was sin of omission: "they sanctified not God in the midst of the children of Israel."—They did not revere the divine authority, did not give unto God the glory due to his name. Isai. viii. 13. 1 Pet. iii. 15. They did not trust in him, so as to inspire others with holy confidence; nor worship him, so as to fill them with reverence and awe. This was the sin of Nadab and Abihu, and for this they died. Lev. x. 3. God also is said to sanctify himself, when he declares his glory, and vindicates his honour from the blasphemies of the wicked. Ezek. xxxvi. 23.

Now Moses and Aaron did not in this instance sanctify the

Lord, nor depend upon his word, in the presence of the people. Num. xx. 12. They discovered their unbelief by looks and gestures, by words and actions, as they also did on another occasion. Num. xi. 21.

2. They were not only chargeable with a sin of omission, but also of commission, for they "trespassed against the Lord." A trespass is any sin or offence, either against God or man. Matt. vi. 15. In Scripture it sometimes signifies more than a common sin, a heinous offence, as in Gen. xxxi. 36. Job xxxiv. 37. A sin of this description is one committed against light and knowledge, including the full consent of the will, and is different from the infirmities incident to good men in general. Hence the sin of Moses and Aaron is called a 'rebellion.' Num. xxvii. 14. We are all by nature dead in trespasses and sins, Ephes. ii. 1; and God has an action of trespass against every man in the world. Here he brings it against Moses and Aaron. The particular sin here called a trespass, was probably that of wrath and passion. Num. xx. 10. Psal. cvi. 33. Moses did not take heed to his spirit, and the impatience of the people inflamed his wrath. The meekest man upon earth suffered himself to be too easily provoked: let those whose tempers are like tinder, beware how they they come near the fire. Moses also seemed to arrogate too much to himself on this occasion: 'Must we fetch you water from the rock?' He ought to have remembered, that neither he nor Aaron could do it, without special assistance from God.

3. Several aggravating circumstances attended the conduct of these holy men.

(1) The place where the trespass was committed: "At the waters of Meribah-Kadesh," where God so eminently displayed his mercy and his power. Psal. cxiv. 7, 8. It was in that wilderness too, where God had led them about, to humble and to prove them, that they might know what was in their hearts. In that very place where they had but just before seen the glory of the Lord. Num. xx. 6.

(2) The company they were in, was another aggravating circumstance: for they trespassed against God "in the midst of the children of Israel." The children of Israel were wicked enough already, ever prone to sedition and rebellion; and shall Moses and Aaron set them a bad example, and harden them in impenitence and unbelief! This was surely a scandalous offence, and it became them to know what they had done. Jer. ii. 33.

(3) The sin also was complicated, not a simple offence, but mixed up with passion and unbelief. It was sin out of character, for Moses their leader, and Aaron their priest. If persons so dignified, so highly honoured of God, could be capable of such conduct; what must the people think! 'Howl, fir tree, for the cedar is fallen, the mighty is spoiled.' Zech. xi. 2.

II. Notice the particular Instruction which this subject is calculated to afford.

1. We are here taught, that the sins of God's people are highly aggravated, more so than those of any other persons. They are commit-

ted against higher obligations, and are the violation of sacred unpropitiated love. Deut. xxxii. 19. Psal. lv. 12. Jer. ii. 5. 31. Injured mercy might well say, Did you ever find me unmindful of my promises, or unfaithful to my engagements? Testify against me. Their sins are also expressive of more unkindness and ingratitude; they are a breach of covenant engagements, and partake more of the nature of rebellion. John vi. 67.

They have tasted of the evil of sin—have felt the powerful attractions of divine love—possessed more knowledge—had more assistance and strength than others. They offer violence, not only to the divine law, but to their own renewed nature. 1 John iii. 9.

The sins of believers are productive of the worst effects: God is more dishonoured by them, the souls of men more injured, and more confirmed in impenitence and unbelief. 2 Sam. xii. 14. Ezek. xiii. 22. They also make bitter work for repentance, when the offender is restored. Psal. xxxviii. li.

2. The sins of good men, though they shall hereafter be forgiven and forgotten, are generally remembered and punished in the present life. Psal. lxxxix. 30—32. xcix. 8. Jer. xxx. 11. David and Peter went to heaven after they had sinned, but it was with broken bones and a broken heart. Moses and Aaron were forbidden to enter into Canaan, but allowed to enter into the rest which remaineth for the people of God. Aaron had not so much as a sight of the holy land; and though Moses had, he was not permitted to enter; and the Lord was inexorable to all his entreaties on the subject. Deut. iii. 23—27. iv. 21.

3. God sometimes warns his people of the judgments that are coming upon them, as we see in the present instance, and also condescends to give the reason of their approach, though their prayers and tears may be unavailing.—He lets Moses know that he must die—and when, and where, and the reason why, in order to revive a sense of his sin; to humble him, to excite renewed repentance, and to fit him for heaven. Thus mercy was mixed with judgment: and if Israel were in Canaan without Moses, it was his felicity to be in heaven before any of them.

4. Though good men do not die *in* their sins, they may nevertheless die *for* their sins; and ‘for this cause many are weak and sickly, and many sleep.’ 1 Cor. xi. 30. This instructs us to watch against sin, against the sin that most easily besets us; and if not given to passion, yet to pray that we enter not into temptation. The righteous, we see, the most eminently righteous are scarcely saved, and saved as it were by fire: Oh where then shall the ungodly and the sinner appear! 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18.

WISDOM OF PROVIDENCE.

And now behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me.—Acts xx. 22, 23.

This is part of Paul's farewell address to the elders at Ephesus; and we see in it much of the man of God, counting nothing dear to him but the sacred service in which he was engaged.

Observe, Paul, though an apostle, and one that knew much of the mind of God, was unacquainted with the particular events of his future life, and knew not what might next befall him.

In general, however, he knew that "in every city" through which he had to pass, "bonds and afflictions awaited him."

What he says of every city, may very well apply to every stage and condition of human life. Whether young or old, rich or poor, in the cottage or on the throne, afflictions and trials of one kind or another, are the common lot of man.

This affecting truth is confirmed by universal experience, as well as by the sacred Scriptures—where shall we find an exception?

Yet it is remarkable, that the knowledge of particular events is concealed from us, till the events themselves are permitted to transpire.

Such a state of things could not arise from accident, but must be the result of special design.

Let us therefore attentively observe

The wisdom of Providence in concealing the knowledge of future events, while it affords a general intimation that in every place, "bonds and afflictions abide us."

1. Such an arrangement is adapted to promote *a life of faith*, and of dependence upon God.—It is written, 'the just shall live by faith:' they must also walk by faith, and not by sight. Israel in the wilderness knew not which way they were to move, nor how long they were to be there, but as the pillar and cloud directed. When the cloud rested upon the tabernacle, they pitched their tents: when it ascended, they departed, and pursued their journey. This was designed to make them feel, that 'man liveth not by bread only; but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'

If we could know beforehand the trials that are appointed for us, we should be less sensible of our need of a guide should be in danger of leaning to our own understanding, and of resting upon our own strength.

2. The present state of things is no less adapted to promote *resignation to the will of God*, and to teach us to cast all our cares upon him. Uncertain as to the future, we may calmly say with David, 'Here I am, let him do with me as seemeth good in his sight.' It is not for

us to be anxious about to-morrow; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. In our walk through this great wilderness, we may safely leave all to our heavenly guide, and trust him to lead us in the right way.

If we knew all that was to come to pass, we might arm ourselves against it; but not knowing the things that shall befall us, we are taught to resign ourselves up continually to the will of Providence, and to have no will of our own.

3. We are hereby taught the necessity of *habitual prayer*, and preparedness for all events.—When we arise in the morning, we know not what temptations and difficulties, what losses or disappointments may attend us through the day. A single hour may deprive us of all our comforts, and of all our friends.

And as we know not what shall befall us, it is good for us to be always bringing our cause before God, and seeking mercy to help us in every time of need.

4. It teaches us to cultivate a *spirit of moderation*, as to the things of the present life. A general expectation of trouble, and our ignorance of particular instances, may serve both to chasten inordinate joy in the season of prosperity, and of sorrow in adversity to weep as though we wept not, and to rejoice as though we rejoiced not.

5. The present system of Providence tends to *arm us against troubles* before they come. A general expectation of trouble, prevents its coming upon us unawares; but an acquaintance with the detail of particular events would sink us in despair. Not knowing them beforehand, we have to encounter them only one at a time, and shall find strength equal to our day: but if we knew the whole at once, they would come upon us in the aggregate, and overwhelm our souls.

We find this to be the case whenever we anticipate future ills: how much more if the whole could be perfectly anticipated. Who indeed would wish to live, if all the variety of evils could be certainly foreknown: sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. It is chiefly by this wise concealment of the future, that life is sweetened to its possessor.

6. As the present is intended *to prepare us for a better state* of existence, so the conduct of Providence is eminently fitted for that purpose.—Though with Jacob we know not the day of our death, yet we know as Job did, that when a few more years are come, we must go the way whence we shall not return. If we love God, we shall have enough to make us happy in the thoughts of another world.

The certainty of the event, without knowing the time when, or the manner how, has a powerful tendency to prepare us for our final change.

Not to live in the expectation of trouble and of death, is the way to expose us to greater misery when they come. Eccles. ix. 12. Luke xxi. 34—36.

ASSURANCE OF FAITH.

Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.—Psalm xxxv. 3.

David was now suffering persecution, both from the tongue and from the hand of his enemies: ver. 1, 11. The beginning of the psalm is a continued prayer for divine interposition, where, under the form of an imprecation on his enemies, he pleads for his own protection and safety. The words of the text, which form a part of his supplication, appear to be interjected, as referring to his spiritual salvation; and could he but be assured of this, it would inspire him with courage against his enemies, and with confidence in the divine interposition on his behalf. But whether so understood or not, the passage may afford us some profitable reflections—

I. All our salvation, from first to last, is from the Lord.

He alone is the salvation of his people, and it ought to be expected only from him. Jonah ii. 9. He is pre-eminently the God of salvation, and this is his memorial in all generations. Temporal deliverances are from him. Ask Daniel, who restrained the fury of the lions? Ask the Hebrew children, who quenched the violence of fire? Ask Jonah, who brought him out of the whale's belly? They would all answer, it was the Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes. 2 Cor. i. 9.

That salvation especially which is spiritual and eternal, can belong only to the Lord: all others are excluded from having any hand in it. Isai. v. 16. Ephes. ii. 8. The way of salvation is of his contrivance; he alone hath found a ransom, and devised means, that his banished ones be not expelled from him: all is the effect of his infinite wisdom and mercy. Ephes. ii. 4, 5. All the blessings of salvation, from its commencement in our justification, to its consummation in glory, are of his providing. The foundation of this building, and the headstone, are brought forth by him, who is wonderful in counsel, and mighty in working.

II. A knowledge of interest in God's salvation is attainable, or David would not have prayed for it.

It is true, all good people do not attain this assurance; some of them live and even die without it; yet it is attainable. Comparative ignorance and unbelief are the chief preventatives.—Some have actually attained: I know, says Job, that my Redeemer liveth. I know, says Paul, in whom I have believed. Primitive believers knew that when their earthly house should be dissolved, they had a building of God, eternal in the heavens. 2 Cor. v. 1. A knowledge of interest in this salvation, is one of the principal objects of Holy Scripture. Rom. xv. 4. 1 John v. 13. It brings us to a conviction of our need of Christ, to our knowledge of him as the only Saviour, to an acceptance

of him in that character, and to a happy persuasion of our interest in his great salvation.

Those who do not actually enjoy this assurance, possess, notwithstanding, the principle from which it proceeds—faith, hope, a conscience purified by the blood of Christ, and unfeigned love to the brethren. 1 John iii. 14. iv. 12.

If the certainty of our salvation were not attainable, we should not be commanded or encouraged as we are to seek after it. Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 10.

III. As an assurance of salvation is possible, so it is also highly desirable.

This appears from David's seeking so earnestly after it: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." The thing speaks for itself, what a satisfaction it would afford to be assured that we are going to heaven. What an antidote against the corroding cares and perplexities of life; what a source of contentment in the midst of poverty and want, and of joy in every tribulation. Hab. iii. 17. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

What confidence would it inspire, in all our approaches to the mercy seat. Psal. lxxiii. 1. Heb. x. 22. Those who are assured of their interest in Christ, come to God as to their best and only friend, as children to their father. Ephes. iii. 12.

This assurance is friendly to persevering holiness: nothing tends more to promote obedience, and a universal conformity to the will of God. 2 Pet. i. 10. Psal. xxvi. 3.

IV. The way to obtain this assurance is, partly by speaking to God, and partly by his speaking to us.

1. By speaking to God, as David does in the language of the text. Prayer, fervent and constant prayer, is the principal means of clearing up our evidence. It is this that makes our face to shine, like the countenance of Moses, when descending from the mount. If we would meet the King of kings, we must do as when we wish to meet a friend; we must wait upon him in his walks. Thus David says, My soul follows hard after thee; and it was not long before he obtained what he so ardently desired. Psal. lxxiii. 8. For every spiritual blessing, God will be inquired of; and he must be sadly mistaken who thinks he has obtained assurance in any other way. When Peter was praying upon the house top, the sheet was let down; and while Daniel was on his knees, the angel brought him good tidings. Dan. ix. 23. And as assurance can only be obtained in this way, so in this way only can it be preserved. God would not leave Jacob, so long as Jacob said, I will not let thee go.

2. By God's speaking to us: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." So that in order to this assurance, God and the soul must meet and converse together. The testimony that David wanted, was personal and particular; Say unto "my soul," I am thy salvation. Jer. xxxi. 3. How is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world: yet so it is. When the Lord Jesus spake to Saul, in the way to Damascus, the voice was so immediately directed to him, that though his companions heard the sound, they understood not the speech.

The testimony is internal and spiritual, the Spirit bearing wit-

ness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. Men speak to the outward ear, but God has access to the "soul," and in the hidden parts can make us to understand wisdom. Rom. viii. 16. When God speaks, it is not only encouraging, but effectual. There is no vocation, no consolation, like that which reaches to the heart. When God speaks, we not only hear but feel. Luke xix. 5, 6. xxiv. 32.

(1) See what it is that alone can satisfy the soul of a good man. God gives to Esau a lordship, to Saul a kingdom, to Judas an apostleship, and they are satisfied. David also had a kingdom, but was not content: "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

(2) This prayer includes all other blessings. If God be our salvation, we have enough; all our desires are fulfilled, all our wants supplied.

(3) Let those who have this assurance be thankful, but let them remember that it can be maintained only by habitual intercourse with God, and that it will need to be frequently renewed.

GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF PAST MERCIES.

Who am I, oh Lord God; and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto!—2 Samuel vii. 18.

These are the reflections of the holy David, after Nathan the prophet had been to him with a message of mercy concerning himself and his posterity after him: ver. 12—17.

The various changes through which he had passed tended to show what was in his heart; and though there was much evil, there was also much good.

We now see him amidst high expectations; but these do not lift him up. He is still as a little child, and his heart overflows with gratitude and love.—Though denied the honour of building a house for God, yet this does not fill him with distress. He is still overpowered with a sense of the divine goodness, and this is heightened by a view of his own meanness and unworthiness.

I. Let us view the subject before us, in reference to the case of David.

We see here a thankful remembrance of past favours, and a humble acknowledgment of having received them all from God.

1. What were the mercies that David recollected: from whence and to what had the Lord "brought" him?

(1) He had to be thankful for renewing grace at an early period of life: he was even then a mighty man, and the Lord was with him. 1 Sam. xvi. 18.

(2) For preserving goodness, amidst innumerable dangers. He had

been delivered from the lion and the bear, while he was a shepherd in the field. The Lord also preserved him from the persecutions of Saul, secured him from danger in the heat of battle, and saved him out of the hands of the Philistine. 2 Sam. xxii. 1, 18—20.

(3) He would also remember how the Lord bowed the hearts of the people, to make him king in Hebron; and how he defeated all the combinations that were formed against him. Psal. iv. 1—3. xviii. 39.

(5) The Lord's making a covenant with him, that his throne should endure forever, or giving it a perpetuity in the person of the Messiah, would be recollected with peculiar gratitude, as containing all his salvation and all his desire. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

2. The sense he entertained of the divine goodness, was greatly increased by considering his own meanness and unworthiness. Most men think of their origin with pride; but David exclaims, Who am I, and what is my house!—Every mercy appeared to him to be the effect of free and unmerited favour.

II. View the subject in reference to ourselves.

Whence and whither are we "brought:" and who are we," that God should bestow upon us so many mercies? Let us try and recollect our obligations—

1. We have been preserved in childhood and in youth, as well as David, and have equal cause for gratitude and praise. We may not have been exposed to lions and bears, as he was; but we were saved from death, while strangers to Christ, and rescued from eternal ruin.

2. Some of us have been called in early life, as well as he, and have known the holy Scriptures from our youth. This is a singular mercy. How great the difference is between those who have been converted in early life, and others who are called at the ninth or eleventh hour.—Compare the life and usefulness of Josiah with that of Manasseh: the latter entered into the Lord's service like a cripple, and when the day was too far spent to engage in any useful labour.

3. We may not have been exposed to all the evils that David was, nor delivered from so many deaths; but if we are real Christians, we have been delivered from much greater even from the lowest hell.

4. Though not advanced to an earthly crown, we have in prospect one that is immortal, and are made kings and priests unto God.

5. If no such covenant has been made with us individually, yet we are interested in the covenant made with David, and participate in all its blessedness. Isai. lv. 3.

Let us also remember our meanness and unworthiness, as David did, and be humbled under it: Who are we, and what is our father's house? Consider

1. The insignificance of the whole of our species, compared with the magnitude of creation. Psal. viii. 3, 4. Prov. viii. 31, 32.

2. The degraded state to which sin has reduced us: we have sunk far beneath the notice of our Creator. Isai. xxvii. 11.

3. The multitudes who have been left to perish in their sins, while we have been distinguished by sovereign grace. 1 Cor. xv. 10.

Such recollections will not only humble us before God, but meeten us for heaven.

THE FINAL JUDGE.

God the Judge of all.—Hebrews xii. 23.

THE privileges of New-Testament believers bear such an analogy to the glories of the heavenly state, that they are here represented as one, and saints have already by faith in Jesus, arrived at the highest pitch of honour and felicity. They have communion with all that have lived and died in the faith, whether patriarchs or prophets, apostles, martyrs, or modern Christians; for they are come to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven. More than this, they have liberty of access to God, under the most awful and impressive character, and his terrors shall not make them afraid. Being freely pardoned, and fully justified from all things, through the blessed Mediator; they now “come to God the Judge of all,” and find in him a Father and a Friend.

The object of the present discourse however will be, to show what is included in the awful character here ascribed to God, and how in particular it affects our interests.

I. Notice for our instruction, what is comprehended in God’s being our Judge, “the Judge of all.”

It evidently supposes his universal propriety, that he is the possessor of heaven and earth; that he is the first cause and last end of all things; that we are his creatures, ‘his offspring,’ and that he who made us has a right to be our Judge. Eccles. xi. 9. xii. 14. More particularly

1. If God be the Judge of all, then all are under a law to him, and must be accountable for their actions: for where there is no law there is no transgression, and where there is no transgression there is no need of any Judge.—Christ came to abolish the penal part of the law, on behalf of them that believe, but has left the preceptive part in full force, and which is of universal obligation. Believers are under it as a rule of life, as well as unbelievers; and neither moral inability, grace or glory, can supercede its authority. Sinners are under it also as a covenant, and so are under its curse, and liable to all its penalties: from this the saints are free, because they have trusted in Him who is the end of the law of righteousness, to every one that believeth. In the great day all men will be judged by this law, as the everlasting rule of righteousness. Judgment will not pass, according as men have believed, for the law is not of faith; but ‘according to their works,’ for obedience

is the test of character, and by works is faith made manifest. Rom. ii. 6. Matt. xxv. 34—36.

2. If God be the Judge of all, then none can evade his scrutiny, but we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. We cannot elude his notice, cannot hide ourselves in the crowd, nor conceal from him the secrets of the heart. Omniscience and omnipotence are the attributes of the Judge. Sinners may call upon rocks and mountains to hide them, but they will call in vain; there will be no refuge for the guilty; all will be naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Rev. vi. 16. Nahum i. 5. The Judge will see us, and we also shall see him, and the nations shall wail before him. Rev. i. 7.

3. If God be the Judge of all, then it will be as impossible to impose upon the Judge, as to evade his scrutiny. Be not deceived, says the Apostle; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Should we disguise the truth so as to impose upon men and angels, yet we cannot deceive the eternal Judge. His eyes discerned the guest that had not on the wedding garment, and the hypocrite will be confounded before him. Matt. vii. 22. He cannot be deceived by doubtful evidence, artful insinuations, or flattering appearances. The darkness conceals nothing from him; but the night shineth as the day. Psal. cxxxix. 12.

4. If God be the Judge of all, then no wrong shall be done to any, for his judgment is according to truth. He is no respecter of persons, and cannot be influenced to give an unrighteous sentence. He will revise and reverse every false judgment that has been passed in this world, and plead the cause of the oppressed. Eccles. iii. 16, 17. He will judge the world in righteousness; justice will hold the balance with an even hand, and the sovereign and the slave will stand on equal ground before him. Acts. xvii. 31. Isai. v. 16.

5. If God be the Judge of all, then a future judgment concerns all, and is a matter of deep and universal interest. From the first man, to the last that shall appear on earth, all are alike amenable to the eternal Judge. None can say, I pray thee, have me excused. Those who shall not stand in the judgment, must nevertheless stand to be judged. Those who put far off the evil day, must live to see it, as well as those who long for its appearing. Willing or unwilling, prepared or not, we must all appear before the dread tribunal, and receive for the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad. And shall not this awaken us out of our carnal security? Knowing the terror of the Lord, we would persuade men. 2 Cor. v. 10, 11. Rev. xx. 12.

6. Though God is the Judge of all, yet in that day he will be the justifier of all that have believed; and whilst others tremble, they will have reason to rejoice. The day of vengeance will be to them a day of mercy. Isai. lxiii. 4. 2 Tim. i. 18. The Judge of all the earth is their God, their covenant God in Christ Jesus; they shall appear before him as sprinkled with atoning blood, and the destroying angel shall not touch them. Isai. xxv. 9. xxxiii. 22. He will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Mal. iii. 17. That love which acquits the believer now, will not condemn him in the last day, but will say, Come ye blessed. Matt. xxv. 34.

II. The use we should make of this awful subject.

1. Let it teach us to set the Lord always before us, in the character of a Judge. This will cause us to stand in awe, that we sin not; and will be a stimulus to holy activity. Phil. iv. 5.

2. How vain and foolish is hypocrisy. If it can be supposed to answer any temporary purpose, it cannot avail us in the great day, but will expose us to a more fearful doom. 'The sinners in Zion shall be afraid, and fearfulness surprise the hypocrite. Isai. xxxiii. 14. Luke xii. 3.

3. As our final salvation or condemnation will be decided by character, of what unspeakable consequence is it, that we examine well into the motive of our actions, and the state of our hearts. Have we seen the evil of sin, so as to loathe ourselves on account of it, and flee to Christ for refuge. If ever we come with peace and hope to God the Judge of all, it must be through Jesus the Mediator, and by the blood of sprinkling.

4. Since all the world cannot save us in the day of judgment, let not all the world prevent us from a serious preparation for that awful day. Amos iv. 12.

LOST SINNERS DIRECTED IN THE WAY.

To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.—Luke i. 79.

The preceding verse, in connexion with the text, gives us a description of the cause and the effects of Christ's coming into the world.

The *cause* of his coming was "the tender mercy of God:" he so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son. Putting on the bowels of a father, who yearns after an unhappy prodigal, the Lord looked on this miserable world, and felt his pity move. David had a rebellious son, and 'his soul longed to go forth to him,' in a way of pity and compassion. Such is the source of Christ's coming: the Eternal Mind commiserated our miserable condition.

The *effects* of Christ's coming are compared with those of the rising sun upon the earth, after a dark and dreary night; giving "light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death." Conceive of a company of travellers, who should be lost on a dark night in a foreign land; some are "sitting" down to watch for the dawning of the day, not knowing which way to go, yet exposed to beasts of prey, and various unknown dangers: the darkness of the night is to them as "the shadow of death." Others perhaps keep on wandering they know not whither; it may be to the edge of a dangerous precipice. At length "the day-spring from on high visits them:" one rises up from the place where he was sitting: the others see how far they have wandered, and by the light of the sun, both are guided in the right way.

Under this imagery, our text gives us an affecting view of the state of the world: all in darkness, and all lost. In this condition Christ found us, when his tender mercy visited us from on high.

Let us here notice three things—Our lost state—the way of peace—and the means of guiding us into it.

I. Observe the lost condition of sinners—wandering about in the dark.

The paths in which poor sinners walk may be various, and admit of various degrees of evil; but they are all going on in darkness, and are far from peace; and if persisted in, will lead to misery and ruin. Rom. iii. 16, 17.

Some are wandering in *heathen* darkness: such was the case with great multitudes, when the true light first shined. The world had made great advances in the light of science: but the world with all its wisdom knew not God, nor the way of peace. Such is the state of great numbers at this day.

Others are little less in darkness, even in *Christian* countries; heathens under the name of Christians, and who are as much in a lost state as those who never heard the gospel.

1. One class of mankind, and that not a small one, are wandering in the paths of open profaneness and immorality. Multitudes of these are every where to be found; men that are guilty of sabbath-breaking, dishonesty, profaning the Lord's name. Nor is this confined to the lower sort of people: it is too common even in high life.

Some who have even had a religious education, are also to be found in this dark road: poor souls, how much are they sunk even below the beasts that perish!

If any such be present, they are far enough from the way of peace: there is no peace to the wicked, saith my God. Yet remember, Christ came to save sinners, even the chief, and to guide our feet into the way of peace. Such were the publicans and harlots, who entered into the kingdom of God: such were the Corinthians, and such were some of you.

2. Another class are entirely devoted to the world: all their object is to get wealth. This is a sin which the world does not condemn, but applauds, if not carried too far: and when it is but little notice is taken of it. The gospel however condemns it utterly, and excludes such from the kingdom of heaven. 1 Cor. vi. 6.

There is no peace for you in this course: you meet with something to make you unhappy, amidst all your worldly prosperity. In some instances you are ruined, and in others disappointed: you are afraid of death, and are often tormented by the apprehension of its approach.

But come to Christ, and all will be well. Isai. lv. 1, 2.

3. There is a class of despisers and persecutors, who love to distress those within their power, on account of their religion; and if they could, like Saul of Tarsus, they would hale men and women, committing them to prison.

But there is no peace for you.

Remember what the Lord

said to Saul: 'Why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' Christ's cause will go on, for all that you can do to hinder it. Take his yoke upon you, and you shall find rest.

4. Another class are walking in some false system of religion: either indulging the hope of the pharisee, in which Christ has no place; or that of the presumptuous, which leads to licentiousness, and makes Christ the minister of sin.

Such may be at ease and feel content, but there is no solid peace even now, and none hereafter.

II. Observe "the way of peace," and wherein it consists.

There can be no doubt what this is: it is that which the apostles testified—the way of salvation, the way of repentance and of faith in Jesus.

1. There can be no peace without reconciliation to God; and this can only be by faith in the Redeemer. It is alone through the blood of the cross that sinners are reconciled to God: and by believing in Christ we are justified, and have peace with God. Rom. v. 1.

2. There is no true peace till we are at peace with ourselves, and our own consciences: and this is accomplished only by believing in Jesus. Till then, all the religion that any one possesses is merely forced upon him: it is conscience driving men against their inclinations. But faith in Jesus renders it a matter of choice, making the yoke easy and the burden light.

3. There is no peace till we feel a meek and lowly spirit towards those around us: but this only can be had by coming to the Saviour, and learning of him. Matt. vi. 29.

III. The means by which the Lord "guides" us into the way of peace.

These are various: sometimes by painful and afflictive providences, or by faithful reproof.—More generally by the preaching of the word, which is the power of God unto salvation. This was employed to overturn idolatry in the first ages: after that, to overturn popery and superstition: and is ordained for the conversion of the world at large.

The means by which a sinner is brought to Christ, is by the "light" of truth arising and shining upon him.

1. The first thing necessary is a conviction, that all our ways have been wrong, and such as lead to death: there is no being guided into the way of peace without this. We must be brought to true repentance: not only the immoral, but what has been accounted the meritorious part of our conduct, must be lamented and abhorred.

We must despair of self, and give up all efforts to make amends by any thing that we can do. Some sort of a peace may be patched up, by a few good works and pious resolutions; but all will come to nothing, till we repent and renounce every false way.

2. The Lord guides us in the way of peace by directing the mind to rest wholly in the Saviour. Peace is not obtained by watchings, and fastings, and prayers, and tears, as a kind of preparatory discipline: it

is only by looking to Jesus, by understanding and believing the gospel way of salvation; by coming to him, confessing our sins. What gave peace to three thousand on the day of pentecost; to the jailor in his distress? Acts ii. 37, 38. xvi. 31.

3. The same divine light that guides our feet into the way of peace, will also direct us to walk in it. Whatever peace we have with God, or whatever peace we enjoy in our own consciences, whether at first conversion, or afterwards, all comes through a Mediator, and is obtained by believing on his name.

MOSES'S PRAYER.

I besought the Lord at that time saying,—I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee, speak no more unto me of this matter.—Deuteronomy iii. 23—26.

Here Moses teaches us how to pray, and God shows us how he will sometimes answer. Moses begins with adoration, and makes the bestowment of former mercies a plea for future ones. Thou hast begun to be gracious; and wilt thou not continue thy loving-kindness to them that fear thee? Num. xiv. 19. Psal. lxxiv. 12.

The prayer of Moses was humble, yet importunate. There is no unbecoming boldness or confidence; he does not come with a demand, but with a petition, and makes supplication to his Judge. He also presents his petition with deep abasement and submission; and thus when we pray for daily bread, we are taught to say, Thy will be done. And when to be delivered from suffering, Not as I will, but as thou wilt.

I. Consider the import of Moses's prayer.

He wished to go over Jordan, to see the good land, the goodly mountain, and Lebanon—

1. Observe, the land of Canaan was to be a possession for his family, and he might wish to see them comfortably settled there.—It was a good land of itself, 'the glory of all lands.' We are allowed to pray for temporal blessings: Jabez did so, and his request was granted. 1 Chron. iv. 10. A good man may grieve that he has not wherewith to honour God, to benefit mankind, or to provide for his own house: and to whom should he apply in such a case, but to him who fixes the bounds of our habitation, and who has every blessing at his command.

2. In the land of Canaan the church of God was to enjoy a settled peace and rest. With a strong hand and a stretched-out arm the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt, and provided for them in the wilderness; but in Canaan they were to receive the full accomplishment of all

the promises made to their fathers. There the worship of God was to be set up, and the ordinances administered in their purity. There that temple was to be built, in which God would take up his special residence. Psal. cxxxii. 18. Things could not be attended to in their proper order in the wilderness, but it should be otherwise in the land of Canaan. Deut. xii. 8, 9. To see the Israelitish church in a state of prosperity, no longer divided, or persecuted by their enemies, but enjoying the divine presence, could not fail to be an object of great desire to Moses.

3. Canaan was a type of heaven, the rest which then remained for the people of God.—There the labours and perils of the wilderness would be forgotten; no more want of bread or of water would be felt, no more distracting fears or dangers: but perfect safety and peace would be enjoyed. ‘My presence shall go with thee,’ saith the Lord, ‘and I will give thee rest.’ And when they entered into Canaan, they had rest from war, and no Canaanite was suffered to dwell among them. Josh. xiv. 15. It was a land which the Lord cared for, and his eyes were continually upon it for good. Deut. xi. 10—12. Much more is the heavenly Canaan in this respect an object of desire. Zeph. iii. 17. Heb. iv. 11.

4. Moses was at this time just upon the borders of the Holy Land, and therefore might well desire to pass over Jordan.—To have a blessing denied him, when so nearly within his reach, must have been not a little trying. Thus however it will be with the foolish virgins in the last day; they will come and knock at heaven’s gate, and be denied. Matt. xxv. 11.

5. In this request Moses had no doubt a regard to the glory of God, as well as to his own immediate comfort and advantage.—He had endured the manners of the Israelites for forty years in the wilderness, and might consider Canaan as a compensation for all his toils and dangers; but his petition was not confined to his own interest. God had ‘begun to shew to his servant his greatness, and his mighty hand:’ and now what would Israel say, and what would the surrounding nations say, if he were to be excluded from the promised land. Josh. vii. 9.

6. After all, Moses did not ask to dwell in the land, he only asked to “see” it. He had heard much of its glory, and wished to be gratified with a sight of it. Both David and Hezekiah wanted to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living; and such a desire is common to all the people of God. Isai. xxxviii. 11. xxxiii. 17. Psal. xxviii. 13.

II. The Lord’s Answer to Moses: “He would not hear me.”

1. “The Lord was angry with me.”—Moses was angry when he spoke unadvisedly at the waters of Meribah, and now God is angry with Moses. But however much he was ashamed of his fault, he is not ashamed to confess it, and to confess it to all Israel. He had sinned before all, and he is humbled before all, though he was a great man, and in high authority. This is a lovely part of Moses’s character.

2. As a warning to the people of Israel he at the same time informs them, that it was “for their sakes,” on their account, that the Lord was

displeased with him. Psal. cvi. 32. They had provoked his spirit: and if for this he had incurred the divine displeasure, what might they expect. Luke xxiii. 31.

3. Moses plainly states the refusal: the Lord "would not hear me." The Lord had heard him for others—for Miriam, when he cured her of the leprosy—for the whole nation of Israel, when he said, 'I have pardoned them as thou hast said'—yet he would not hear him for himself.

Sin lay at the door; this it was that made prayer ineffectual, and that causes God to turn away his ear from his people.

4. In refusing the petition of his servant, God teaches him submission and contentment: "Let it suffice thee."—The revealed will of God calls for obedience; and when his secret will is ascertained, it requires resignation, without murmuring or repining.

The Lord sometimes appears not to regard the prayers of his people, as in the case of the woman of Canaan, of whom it is said, that Jesus 'answered her not a word.' Sometimes he answers them roughly, by terrible things in righteousness: but here he gives a direct, though negative answer. Hence we must learn to be content with the appointments of his providence, with the state in which he has placed us, willing to live or to die at his command.

5. Though God refuses to hear Moses's prayer, yet at the same time he puts an honour upon him, by desiring that he would "speak no more to him of the matter.—Moses was prevalent in prayer, and God delighted to hear him; but lest he should now prevail by importunity, he is desired to desist, and to be content with the answer already given. Like Jacob, if he wrestled with the angel, he was sure to prevail; and the Lord, in infinite condescension, would not suffer his determination to be put to the test. This is a sweet exception to the general rule, of God's hearing the prayers of his people, and shews that while he rejected the petition he loved the petitioner, and rejected it only to express his displeasure against sin. The Lord may refuse to grant particular requests even while he accepts the person who offers them. Exod. xxxii. 10. 2 Chron. vi. 8, 9. Luke viii. 38.

6. Though the Lord did not grant Moses his request, yet he dealt very graciously with him, and allowed him his desire in part. He did not suffer him to pass over Jordan, but gave him a sight of the good land from mount Pisgah; and thus his desire to "see" the goodly mountain was in part fulfilled. And if he did not enter into the earthly Canaan, he would soon have a much better inheritance. If the Lord does not grant his people a particular request, he usually gives them an equivalent. He would not hear David for his infant son, but he gave him a Solomon. Nor Paul, when he prayed to be delivered from the messenger of Satan; but he gave him a promise, on which he might lean as on a staff, during the rest of his pilgrimage. 2 Cor. xii. 8—10.

(1) Let us learn, that though our prayers may not all be answered, yet the Lord will do for us exceedingly above all we can ask or think; and if we love him, all things shall work together for our good.

(2) The Lord we see is never at a loss for means and instruments to carry on his work. If Moses is called away, Joshua shall succeed him.

EVIDENCES OF ADOPTION.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.—John i. 12.

Since God has sent his Son into the world as the Saviour of the lost, the great concern of sinners is to be interested in him. What we think of him, and how we stand affected towards him, is the great turning point of salvation. If we believe in him, our sins are forgiven us for his name sake: but if not, the wrath of God abideth on us.

The principal design of the apostles was to exhibit Christ, and it is evident that their hearts were full of him.

In this connexion the sacred writer mentions three different kinds of treatment which the Saviour met with. One from the world in general: "they knew him not." Another from his own nation, to whom he came: "they received him not." And another from the godly: "they received him, and believed on his name."

The first of these may be descriptive of such as did not hear the gospel, but merely abused the light of nature: this therefore cannot apply to us.—We are all in the situation of the second or third class; for though Christ is not personally come to us, yet having sent us the word of salvation, it amounts to the same thing: we either receive him or we receive him not.

1. Inquire what is supposed or included in "receiving" Christ.

In general, it is the same for substance as "believing on his name." There may be some shades of difference in the meaning of the terms, believing, trusting, and receiving; but their general import is the same, or they would not be so represented in the text.

Believing has respect to Christ as exhibited in the gospel testimony trusting, as revealed with promises and receiving, supposes him to be the free gift of God, presented for our acceptance.

But all comes to the same thing; he that believes the testimony, trusts the promises; and he that trusts in him, in so doing, receives Christ as the unspeakable gift of God.

More particularly,

1. To receive Christ implies a sense of our need of him.—The want of this is the reason why so many receive him not. Why do unbelievers reject the gospel; and nominal Christians impugn its leading doctrines? Because those doctrines are holy. They see no such evil in sin as to need a Saviour: or if they feel the need of a Saviour, it is only of such a one as can teach them the right way. They feel no need of grace, no need of an atonement, no need of a new creation, and being born again. Others who think little about doctrines, yet make light of religion, in favour of the world.

No man ever yet embraced the Saviour, till he perceived his need of him. How can we receive a free salvation, till convinced of our own

utter unworthiness? How can we feel our need of help, till helpless in ourselves? How can we flee for refuge, to lay hold on the hope that is set before us, till we are aware of our danger, and find ourselves hopeless?

Consider whether the want of this conviction be not at the bottom of your case, while living without Christ in the world?

2. Receiving him includes the renunciation of every thing that stands in competition with Christ. We cannot receive this guest, and yet retain our old ones. We must refuse the world for our portion, before we can embrace the Saviour as our all in all. Heb. xi. 24—26

All your vain notions, vain hopes, and self-righteous dependance must be given up: what you have accounted gain must become as loss. Phil. iii. 8. You must no longer go about to establish your own righteousness, but cordially submit to the righteousness of God. Rom. ix. 27.

Are none of these obstructions in the way of your receiving Christ, and believing on his name?

3. A reception of Christ includes a dependance upon him in all his offices, and for all the purposes for which he is given to us of God.—His office as a Priest is to take away sin: and do we come to him for that purpose?

As a King he is given to reign over us: and do we willingly “take his yoke upon us?”

As a Prophet he teaches us the good and the right way, not only by precept, but example: and do we ‘learn of him?’

Are there any who have not found rest to their souls? Come to Jesus; receive him into your hearts, and all will be well.

II. The privilege connected with a reception of Christ: “To them gave he power to become the sons of God.”

As creatures we are all the children of God: but by sin we are become aliens. His love to us as the Creator is as it were extinguished; so that he cannot constantly treat us as children. Instead of this, he threatens us as enemies with utter destruction. Gen. vi. 7. Isai. xxvii. 11.

If the Lord now treats us as children, it must be by adoption and grace.

This is a new relation not in common with the world, but as distinguished from the world. 2 Cor. vi 17, 18—A relation in which the love of God is wonderfully displayed. 1 John iii. 1. Jer. iii. 19.

But wherein consists its advantages?

1. Power to become the sons of God, gives us liberty of access to him as our Father. Ephes. ii. 17, 18.

2. The privilege of fraternal intercourse with the members of his family. Heb. xii. 22, 23.

3. An eternal inheritance with the saints in light. Acts xxvi. 18.

• NOAH SAVED IN THE ARK.

Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.—
Genesis vii. 23.

A conscientious obedience to the divine commands, will be attended with tokens of the divine approbation. 'The Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; and according to all that God commanded him, so did he.' And now he that distinguished himself by the promptitude of his obedience, is distinguished by the special favour and protection of Heaven.

I. Offer a few general observations upon the text.

1. The protection afforded to Noah and his family extended only to life: their houses, lands, and all their other possessions, were involved in the common destruction. Thus also it was with Job: 'his life only was spared. Job ii. 6. God intended him not only as a monument of suffering, but also of mercy. Jam. v. 10.

We here see that life and death are in the hand of the Lord; not in our own hand, nor in the hand of either our enemies or our friends. Psal. lxiv. 9. Job xii. 10. No sickness will be unto death, till God ordains it; for our days are determined, and the number of our months are with him. A particular providence watches over the life and death of the saints. Psal. cxviii. 17.

It is also a great mercy to have life spared, though we should lose every thing else. What will not men endure for the love of life, and what hazards will they not encounter to preserve it. Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life. It was for the life of her people that queen Esther ventured into the presence of the king, Esther vii. 3; and to Baruch was his life given as a prey. Jer. xlv. 5.

2. The means of preservation to Noah and his family was the ark. Being moved with fear, he prepared an ark to the saving of his house. Heb. xi. 7. When Lot warned his sons in law, his admonitions appeared to them as an idle tale; but it was not so with Noah. He was successful in constructing the building, and in the preservation of all his family.

This ark was of divine appointment, and like the blessed Redeemer, the only refuge from the wrath to come. Its construction was regulated by special revelation, and the whole plan marked out by infinite wisdom. Such also is the method of salvation by Christ; it is not the effect of human contrivance, but of the manifold wisdom of God. Ephes. i. 7, 8. iii. 10.

The ark was sufficiently capacious for all who made it their place of refuge; it contained all that believed, and preserved them from the watery deep. In like manner Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour to all that put their trust in him. He has received innumerable multitudes, and 'yet there is room;' and him that cometh, he will in no wise cast out. Luke xiv. 23. John vi. 37.

3. Noah's safety depended not merely upon his building the ark, but upon his coming into it, and the one as well as the other was essential to his preservation. Had he expected safety in any other way, after the threatenings and warning that had been given, he would have been guilty of the most awful presumption, and have perished in the flood. So, though a Saviour is provided in the gospel, it will be utterly unavailing, unless we believe in him, and are found in him. Phil. iii. 9. He is the only covert from the storms of life, the only refuge from the wrath to come. Isai. xxxii. 2. 1 Thess. i. 10. Had the manslayer neglected to flee to the city of refuge, and to enter into it, the avenger of blood would have overtaken him. Had not Noah gone into the ark, he could not have remained alive. And if the sinner makes not Christ his refuge, he cannot be saved. Acts iv. 12. He is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him, but to the disobedient a stone of stumbling and rock of offence. Heb. v. 9. 1 Pet. ii. 8. As there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, so there is nothing but condemnation to them who believe not on him. Rom. viii. 1. John iii. 36.

4. Though all were saved that were in the ark, yet they were but few in number, only eight persons. 1 Pet. iii. 20. Yet it was better to be with these few, than to be numbered with the multitude. Many would wish to be saved, but not in God's way: it is only the few that are saved from their sins. The real church of Christ is a little flock, a little city, and but few men in it. Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, but unto none of them was he sent in the time of famine, save unto a woman of Sarepta. Luke iv. 25, 26. Out of four sorts of ground, which were sown with the seed of the kingdom, only one of them proved fruitful. If then there be few only that are saved, how much it becomes us to examine ourselves, and to prove our own selves, whether we be in the faith. 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

5. In the preservation of Noah and his family and in the salvation of all that believe, there is an evident display of sovereign and distinguishing grace. The difference made between fallen men and fallen angels, between Noah and the old world, and between those who are saved and those who finally perish, can only be ascribed to Him who hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and compassion on whom he will have compassion. Rom. ix. 15, 16. It is true, God established his covenant with Noah, and sheltered him in the ark because, as he said, 'Thee only have I found righteous.' But if Noah were asked how he became righteous, he must answer as Paul did: 'By the grace of God I am what I am,' and every believer must say the same. 1 Cor. iv. 7. Ephes. ii. 8.

II. Improvement of the subject.

1. In times of general calamity, the Lord often distinguishes his own people. It was so in the destruction of Sodom, Gen. xix. 29; in the destruction of Jerusalem, Ezek. ix. 4; and in the destruction of the old world. Psal. xlv. 1—3. So also it will be in the last day. Mal. iii. 17.

2. See how good it is to be connected with those who fear God. Mercy was shewn to Noah's family for his sake, and with him was the

covenant of peace established. Gen. vi. 18. Potiphar's house was prospered for Joseph's sake, and God usually bestows mercy on the unworthy, out of regard to the righteous. Acts xxvii. 24.

3. The ruin brought upon the old world, is only the prelude of its final destruction. 2 Pet. iii. 6, 7.

4. Whenever we think of the flood, let us also remember the ark. Our danger and our safety are alike revealed in the Scriptures, and it is unprofitable to contemplate the one without the other. When we think of our guilt and misery, let us also think of the Saviour.

UNGODLY PROFESSORS ADMONISHED.

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you: cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double minded.—James iv. 8.

In the early period of the Christian church it was said, that 'great grace was upon them all:' but as things proceeded, many were found amongst them who were mere professors, having nothing of religion but the form.

Such was the case in James's time.—His epistle is addressed to the believing Jews; but in writing to them, he at the same time addresses himself to unbelievers among them, as in the language of our text.

He supposes indeed that they did not live without prayer; but that when they prayed, they received not, because they asked amiss; ver. 3.

He also describes them as being of a worldly spirit, and double minded in all their ways. Hence the pointed language now before us—

I. Consider the characters addressed.

1. Though they were professors of religion, they are considered as far from God.—In all their prayers and religious duties, they never "draw nigh to God," have no communion with him; and though belonging to the church, they are living without God in the world. Characters of this description are still to be found in every Christian society.

2. Their "hands" and their "hearts" are supposed to be defiled.—They had not laid aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisy, and envies, and all evil-speakings, that as new-born babes they might desire the sincere milk of the word. 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2. They are still under the power of darkness, and the dominion of sin: their hands are full of oppression and fraud, and their hearts full of impurity. They live after the flesh, and war after it; fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

The apostle calls them "sinners," though they may profess to be saints, and be numbered with the people of God.

3. Under a profession of religion, they were nevertheless "double-minded;" halting between God and Baal, and were sometimes this, and sometimes that.

When conscience is awakened by the application of some powerful truth, or by the occurrence of some alarming providence, then they are on the Lord's side.

When in the company of pious people, they can be pious too: but when they are in the world, and mix with worldly company, they are on the side of the world. 1 Kings xxii. 4.

II. The counsel given them: "Draw nigh to God—cleanse your hands—purify your hearts."

And what does all this denote? Some may think it sufficient to answer,—Pray to God, and reform what is amiss in your conduct. This indeed is included, but this is not all; it includes repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The exhortation supposes that God is accessible through a Mediator; for without this there would be no invitation to "draw nigh."

If no Mediator were provided, we should be like the fallen angels, without hope: the name of the Lord could not have been invoked, with any assurance of success.

But the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin: we may therefore draw nigh to him, though we are "sinners," great sinners, and have offended against light and knowledge.

The fountain is opened for sin and uncleanness, and we may wash and be clean.

2. Though exhorted to "cleanse our hands and purify our hearts," these acts are not preparatory to repentance and faith, but the very things themselves.

No other way of drawing nigh to God has the promise of acceptance: no other cleansing will purify the heart.

The influence of some inferior principle may be insufficient to cleanse the hands, but not the heart; but the cleansing will only be partial, and not lasting.

Genuine repentance will both cleanse the hands and the heart.

Weeping at the Saviour's feet, a Magdalene was made clean; and of the impure Corinthians it is said, But ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. vi. 11. Isai. xxx. 21, 22.

A sinner under the first conviction generally reforms his conduct, and casts away his open sins; but his heart can only be purified by faith; and without this, there can be no entering into the kingdom of God. Matt. v. 8.

III. The encouragement to comply with this advice: "God will draw nigh to you."

This language does not imply that man is the first mover in the great affair of salvation: far from it. We are apprehended of Christ, before we apprehend him: he draws us, and we run after him. John vi. 44. xii. 32. Phil. iii. 12.

But it does suppose that repentance precedes forgiveness, and believ-

ing in Jesus. The Lord may draw near to us in his secret influence on the heart, and does so before we draw near to him; but not in a way of fellowship and communion not as a God pardoning iniquity, and giving rest to the soul. We must come to Christ by faith, before that can be obtained. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

How important are these words: "I will draw near to you" what condescension, for the great God to draw near to a worm of the dust; yes, near to you; as a father, a friend, and a guide near to you in death, when every other friend must take their leave. Psal. xlviii. 14.

Oh what a state, for a sinner to be called to die, when no one can help him but God, and for God to be afar off!

INCONCEIVABLE MAGNITUDE OF GOD'S WORKS.

Oh Lord, how great are thy works: and thy thoughts are very deep.—Psalm xcii. 5.

The title of this psalm informs us that it was written for the Sabbath day; and that day was not to be an idle one. If we have ceased from worldly labour, it is that we may be engaged in the service of God. There is nothing in this psalm peculiar to the Jewish Sabbath, and therefore it is applicable to us.

The principal subject of praise was the manifestation of God in his works. This may include the works of nature, but not them only: the whole of the divine operations, in the government of the world, in redeeming and preserving Israel, are no doubt comprehended.

David's meditations would probably be employed about those marvellous works by which the history of their nation was so highly distinguished: he saw a magnitude in the works of God, and a depth in his designs, that delighted and astonished him. The history of Jacob and his family, that of Joseph, and the coming up of Israel out of Egypt.

God's thoughts had always been "deep;" but now they begin to appear in his works: every thing would seem to have a respect to the great work of redeeming Israel, as God's ultimate design. Similar to this is our redemption by the blood of Christ. David had seen something of this, but we have seen much more. The work has been going on ever since his time, and the fulness of time is come: the work of human redemption is now finished on the cross, and we have seen the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.

In the text, God's works and thoughts are both united, because they always go together. He never operates without design: his works are only the means of bringing his eternal purposes to view, and of showing what his thoughts have been ever of old.

I. Endeavour a little to illustrate the magnitude of God's works, and the depth of his designs.

As the works of God are interwoven one with another, it would be difficult to consider them distinctly: he is both great in counsel, and mighty in working. Jer. xxxii. 19.

The works of creation are doubtless very great, and the result of infinite wisdom: in them are united the vast and the minute. It would occupy the whole of life, only to understand the wisdom and goodness of God in the formation of the human frame, or to develop any one of the great works of God in nature. Hence the most sublime geniuses, after they have spent their whole lives in searching into the subject, have only been able to make a little progress in that. How impossible the comprehension of the whole, with its infinite variety of means and ends.

Yet the whole of creation is only the theatre on which his greater works are to be displayed. His government of the world, and his redemption of sinful men, are works of infinite magnitude and depth: in surveying these, we know not where to begin, nor where to conclude.

We can only observe,

1. That God's works in this respect are so great, that all other works are comprehended in them, and rendered subservient to their accomplishment.—All things are at work in heaven, earth, and hell.

All things in the natural world. Psal. cxlviii. 7, 8.

All things in the political world; the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires, and all the counsels and changes attending them, are only subservient to his great designs; and Nebuchadnezzar was made to know this at last. Dan. iv. 34, 35.

All things in the moral world: man works, angels work, devils work, error works, truth works, sin works, righteousness works: all things hasten to their final issue.

But God works all things according to the counsel of his own will; so that all wicked beings are fulfilling his purposes without intending, and even without knowing it. "Lord, how great are thy works; and thy thoughts are very deep!"

2. As a farther proof of this, we may observe, that many of the greatest events have arisen from small beginnings, and been effected by the most unlikely means.—In this way many mighty works were wrought under the Old Testament. God called Abraham alone, and blessed and increased him: the fall of Jericho led to the possession of Canaan: the host of Midian was defeated by three hundred men, with nothing but lamps and earthen pitchers.

Under the New Testament, similar means have been employed. God has defeated the host of heathen idolatry and of Jewish unbelief in the same way as he did that of the Midianites, by putting the treasure into earthen vessels; and out of the mouth of babes and sucklings he has ordained strength.

Even wicked means on the part of men have been brought to a wonderful issue, by the overruling hand of God. The conduct of Joseph's brethren in selling him into Egypt, and that of the Jews in crucifying the Saviour, were of this description: yet they fulfilled the divine counsel. Gen. 1. 20. Acts ii. 23. iv. 27, 28.

3. The amazing circuit which the works of God require for their accomplishment, is a farther proof of their magnitude.—What a length of time from the giving of the first promise to the call of Abraham—fifteen hundred years. From that period to the coming of Christ, the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of Abraham—two thousand five hundred years more. Yet all this time was required to bring things about in a way that should accomplish the divine purposes.

First there was the giving of the promise to Adam; then the renewal of it to Abraham, after fifteen hundred years; then the coming out of Egypt, which required four hundred years more; and after this full two thousand years till the advent of the Saviour.

And now that the gentiles have been called, nearly two thousand years more are allotted for the gathering of the Jews. What displays of sovereignty and of wisdom, of justice and of grace are here: how mighty and how vast!

Also for the destruction of antichrist, 'one thousand two hundred and three-score years are appointed;' meanwhile, innumerable events of the utmost importance are to take place.

What a system is here: yet who can comprehend the vast circumference of the work of redemption itself!

4. The number of important ends that are answered by the same work, tend also to display its magnitude. The incarnation, obedience, and death of Christ, have a wonderful influence, both on heaven and earth. justice and grace are exhibited at once in the brightest forms the gospel is both a savour of life unto life, and of death unto death. the rejection of the Jews is an awful judgment upon them, and yet an instance of unexampled mercy to the world. Rom. xi. 11, 15, 22.

II. Improvement.

If the Lord's works are so great, and his thoughts so very deep, then,

1. Let us seek to understand them.—They are sought out of all them that have pleasure therein: and it is a great sin to disregard the operations of his hand. Psal. xxviii. 5. cxi. 2. Isai. v. 12.

Foolish men overlook them, and men of worldly wisdom do not understand them: they lie beyond the surface of things, and must be diligently 'sought out.'

2. Let us beware of indulging hard thoughts of the ways of God, through impatience and unbelief.—We cannot judge of his threatenings against sinners, nor of his providences, in the present state.

3. It will be the work of heaven to explore these wonders, and to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. Ephes. iii. 18, 19. iv. 13.

DANGER OF RELIGIOUS INDECISION.

Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house.—Luke ix. 61.

When the marriage supper was provided, and the guests were invited, they all with one consent began to make excuse. And here, out of three that were invited to follow the Saviour, two are for pleading some delay; one wanted to go and bury his father, and the other to take leave of his friends. There is always something or another to hinder us in the path of duty, and to weaken our resolutions in following the Lord fully: it is therefore our wisdom to see the danger, and to guard against it. For this purpose let us

Consider the resolution mentioned in the text, and what are its principal defects.

1. He wished to follow Christ, but there was something of more urgent necessity that must first be attended to.—Thus the sick oftentimes resolve to reform their lives when they recover, but remain as before. The youth wishes to be religious but thinks that so grave a subject had better be deferred to old age. He must have a little more pleasure in his early days, and then he will attend to the concerns of his soul, will repent and obey the gospel. The servant must be free from his master, and then he thinks of becoming the servant of God. Some are for putting matters off for a few years, others only for a few days, when they shall be more at liberty from present difficulties and engagements. The folly of all this is very apparent: the concerns of the soul are of as much importance at this moment as they can be at any future time; life is uncertain, and every delay is a step towards final impenitence. Heb. iii. 8.

2. The person who formed the resolution in the text, evidently made it in his own strength.—Here is no reference whatever to divine assistance, no dependance upon the Lord, no seeking for grace to help in time of need, but an unqualified and self-confident resolution. “Lord, I will follow thee.” How easy and how vain are such promises, yet how frequently do they meet our observation. The children of Israel said, ‘We will serve the Lord;’ but considered not that his service required the renunciation of all their idols, and of all their sins. Josh. xxiv. 19. And in order to follow Christ we must deny ourselves and take up the cross, which grace only can enable us to do. John xv. 5.

3. The resolution when formed, seemed to depend on the consent of his friends, for though he speaks only of taking his leave, he probably wished to know whether they approved of the step he was about to take. Had he been influenced by proper motives, instead of leaving them behind, he would rather have endeavoured to bring them with him, to follow Jesus in the way. Thus did Andrew and Philip, John i. 40—45; the woman of Samaria, John iv. 28—30, and others. Luke viii. 39.

But here was no seeking first the kingdom of God and his

righteousness, no forsaking all for Christ, but a cleaving to worldly connexions rather than to him. Matt. x. 37.

4. Instead of following Christ cheerfully and with all his heart, he appeared somewhat dejected at the thought, and must go and take leave of his friends, as if he were about to die, and should see them no more. Such are the melancholy apprehensions which some persons entertain of true religion; they imagine it would be injurious to their worldly interest, and unfit them for the common duties and enjoyments of life, and that therefore they must take a final leave of the concerns of the present world.

Whereas, by cleaving to the Lord we should be better prepared to serve our generation, and to enjoy the blessings of providence. Religion improves all the relations, and heightens and endears to us all the comforts of life. Eccles. ix. 7.

5. By going home to his friends, he would expose himself to great temptation, and be in danger of breaking the resolution already formed. They would upbraid him with folly for attaching himself to a sect every where spoken against, and to a person so generally despised.

Paul consulted not with flesh and blood, neither must we, if we would follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Gal. i. 16. Those who are on the Lord's side must be as Levi, they must not know their own kindred. Deut. xxxiii. 9.

(1) This subject may serve as a warning to those who trifle with the calls of the gospel. Here was a looking back, a lingering after the world, and Christ pronounces such to be unfit for the kingdom of God: ver. 62.

(2) Nothing but a decided attachment to Christ, and a determination to sacrifice all for his sake, can constitute us his disciples.

(3) Let us beware of the ensnaring influence of worldly connexions, and of every inordinate affection; for these, rather than grosser evils, are the ordinary impediments to our salvation. Matt. xvi. 26.

DELIVERANCE FROM THE FEAR OF DEATH.

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage.—Hebrews ii. 14, 15.

In the foregoing part of this epistle, the apostle very fully insists on the deity of Christ, and his infinite superiority to angels: ch. i. 3, 8. In this chapter he obviates an objection from its being well known that he was a man, and actually suffered death. The argument is, that as those whom he came to save were constituted of flesh and blood, he must of necessity be the same, or he could not have been their brother

or near kinsman, to whom the right of redemption belonged; neither could he otherwise have answered the great and important ends of his coming into the world. These are particularly specified—

(1) If he had not become flesh and blood, he could not have died; for deity could not suffer. He must therefore have been mortal, for he could never have tasted of death at all, but for the assumption of our nature.

(2) If he had not died, he could not have destroyed him who had “the power of death;” that is, the devil. He must enter into the house of the strong man armed, in order to spoil his goods.

(3) Had he not destroyed him who had the power of death, he could not have “delivered them” who were all their lifetime subject to bondage: hence it was necessary that he should be the Son of man as well as the Son of God, and that he should be made perfect through suffering.

I. Explain the subject.

Three things require to be noticed;—In what respect had Satan the power of death?—Who are the persons that through fear of death were subject to bondage?—How did the death of Christ effect their deliverance?

1. In what respect had Satan “the power of death?” Death was his servant: though it was the sentence of the divine Lawgiver upon man as a sinner, and as such, made a part of his punishment; yet it became subservient to the wishes of the enemy. Every soul it seized furnished him with prey: so that Satan went hand in hand with death throughout the world, and gratified his infernal joy in all its dreadful victories. Also because the death of sinners was under his influence. He presided, and must for ever have presided, over their destruction; either deluding them with false hopes, or terrifying them with fear and dread. Hence death was under his power.

2. Who are the persons particularly alluded to, “who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage?” In general they were old-testament believers. Death must be terrible to all men, if their eyes were open to see their doom, unless its sting be removed. If it were less so to heathens, who are without a revelation, it must be owing to their ignorance and delusion: but old-testament saints had light enough to know their exposedness to the wrath to come, and saw but very dimly how that wrath was to be averted and appeased.

The Saviour had not appeared to them: life and immortality were not brought to light. Seeing this enemy prevailing over all, without any one to conquer him, they were like Israel before Goliath, previous to the appearance of David. They were not without hope, and

good hope of future life; but it was mixed with many fears. They saw but dimly how sin was to be taken away: a remembrance of it was made every year in their sacrifices the way into the holiest of all was not made plain: they therefore stood without. Hence their fear of death, as in the case of Hezekiah. How different from his is the language of new-testament believers: ‘We know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building

of God.' 2 Cor. v. 1. Phil. i. 23. 2 Tim. iv. 6. It is true, Christians may live too much under the influence of an old-testament spirit; but if they do, it is not for want of sufficient consolation in the gospel!

3. How is it that the death of Christ "destroyed the Destroyer, and effected the deliverance of the fearful?" Through his atonement the sting of death is removed, and believers are delivered from the curse: a way is open for the pardon of sin, and free access unto the Father. Death is no longer under the power of Satan: it is Christ's servant and ours. 1 Cor. iii. 22. Neither is the death of believers under his influence: by faith in Jesus they are armed against the terrors of death, and can triumph over it. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

II. Apply the subject to ourselves.

The comfort in the text does not belong to all, because

1. Though the power of Satan over death is destroyed, it is only on behalf of believers. Others are completely under its terrific power: death is Satan's servant still, to execute his wishes upon them: believers only obtain the victory.

2. Though Christ's coming, and laying down his life, delivered those who through fear of death were "subject to bondage," yet it is only in regard to those who so enter into the design of his death, as really to possess the advantages of the gospel dispensation. The deliverance is objective, rather than subjective: it consists rather in laying a ground for deliverance, than actually accomplishing it. There are some new-testament believers who still possess a spirit of bondage: they have objective light, but not discernment: hence the language of the text, though spoken of old-testament saints, is applicable to many of the latter. If weak in the faith, so as to doubt of gospel truth; or in knowledge, so as not to enter into it; or if we have sinned, and God has a controversy with us; or if our constitution tends to gloom and sadness, we shall be liable all our lifetime to be in bondage through fear of death, notwithstanding Christ has died to deliver us from it.

But if we cleave to him under all, he will deliver us from the fear of death at last, and the lame shall take the prey. Many have had a joyful disappointment in this respect, after all the fear and dread with which their whole lives had been burdened.

AWFUL CONTEMPT OF GOD.

Thou hast cast me behind thy back.—2 Kings xiv. 9.

Jeroboam, though destitute of all religion, was not without natural affection. His son and heir being dangerously ill, he sends his wife under disguise to the prophet, to know what would become of him. The ser-

vants of the Lord, who are neglected in a time of prosperity, are often sought to in the day of adversity. Jeroboam did not consult the prophet, when he set up the calves at Dan and at Bethel, and said to Israel, these be your gods; but now in the time of his distress, a forgotten prophet came to his remembrance, and he hoped that he who had foretold his advancement to the Israelitish throne, would tell him some good news concerning his son.

On the contrary, Ahijah was commissioned with heavy tidings; and the disguised queen no sooner presents herself before the prophet, than her dissimulation is instantly detected, and she is made to hear the doom of her afflicted child: ver. 5, 6. Thus God will deal with hypocrites in the last day, for he will treat them according to what they are, and not according to what they seem to be. Those who feign themselves penitents, and say they are Christians, and are not, shall be stripped of their disguise and stand exposed in their proper colours.

Observe also how faithfully and fearlessly the prophet speaks: ver. 7—12. God's messengers must not fear the face of any one. Samuel must say to Saul, thou hast done very foolishly: Nathan to David, thou art the man: and Ahijah must be equally faithful in his message to Jeroboam. He therefore charges him with impiety and apostacy, and especially with the heinous and aggravated sin of idolatry—"Thou hast cast the Lord behind thy back."

I. Explain the nature of this aggravated sin.

The charge is not peculiar to Jeroboam, nor to the people of Israel, to whom it is frequently applied. Ezek. xxiii. 25. It is applicable also to a numerous class of unbelievers—

1. Casting the Lord behind our backs, includes an habitual and wilful forgetfulness of him, which indicates the most shocking contempt. Psal. x. 4. l. 22. To a renewed mind the remembrance of God is sweet, and never is it more delighted than when it can get rid of other objects, to contemplate his adorable perfections. Psal. lxiii, 5, 6. civ. 34. cxxxix. 17. The opposite to all this is the character of the ungodly. Job xxi. 14. Rom. i. 28.

2. It includes a fearful and deliberate contempt of divine authority. To cast any thing behind our back, not only supposes that we do not think of it, but that we determine not to think of it, or to have any thing more to do with it. Jer. ii. 27. Isai. xxx. 11. To turn our backs upon a person is considered as an instance of great contempt; but the impiety of Jeroboam exceeded this: he even presumed to "cast" the Lord behind him, which is expressive of the utmost aversion and abhorrence. He set the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and despised and rejected the Holy One of Israel. Such is the awful depravity of the human heart, that men cast off the fear of God, his threatenings, laws, and ordinances, as useless and worthless; and wherefore do they thus condemn God? Psal. x. 13. Oh foolish people and unwise, to provoke the Lord to anger, and to tempt a power which ye cannot flee.

3. The sin of Jeroboam includes in it a continued departure from

God, and an increasing aversion to his holy will. Having got him out of their sight, by casting him behind their backs, the object of the wicked is to rush forward in the ways of sin and folly, without any further remonstrance or restraint. The desire of the righteous is to set the Lord always before them; that of the ungodly is to banish him for ever from their sight. They first depart from him in their thoughts, and then in their actions; first forget his presence, and then their obligations. The fool says in his heart, no God, and then is guilty of abominable works. Psal. xiv. 1.

II. Consider the dreadful consequences of this depravity.

The very manner in which the evil itself is described, carries in it an inconceivable degree of turpitude. To cast behind our backs the infinite Majesty of God, the blessed and only Potentate, the fountain of all our mercies and of all our hopes—to treat with insolent contempt that Being, whose frown can sink us to the lowest hell—to despise the riches of his goodness, and reject him both as a Lawgiver and a Saviour, includes in it an enormity which it is fearful to contemplate, and which will meet with the most awful retribution.

1. God will deal with such as they have dealt with him: he will cast them behind his back for ever. Their souls loathed him, and he will treat them with perpetual detestation. Zech. xi. 8. They have turned their backs upon the laws and ordinances of God, and he will turn his back upon their prayers and supplications. Isai. i. 10, 15. They said to the Almighty, depart from us; and he will say, depart ye cursed. They walked contrary to him, and he will walk contrary to them. Lev. xxiv. 23, 24. With the froward he will shew himself froward, and will bring down high looks. Psal. xviii. 26, 27. He will either break the heart or the neck of those who set themselves against him, and will lead them to repentance or to ruin. As a man sows, so shall he also reap. If we hide our face from God, he will hide his face from us; and if we turn our back on him, he will turn his back on us in the day of our calamity. Jer. xviii. 17.

2. Though God will cast the wicked behind his back, as if he cared not what became of them, yet he will set their iniquities before his face, and they shall be marked in the light of his countenance. Thus Israel found it, after all their murmurings in the wilderness. Psal. xc. 8. As God treasures up mercy for an obedient people, so he treasures up wrath for the rebellious. Rom. ii. 5. For the present their sin may appear to be hid, but it is only laid up for punishment. Hos. xiii. 12.

3. Those who cast God behind their back, can expect no assistance or relief under the sorrows and afflictions of the present life, any more than deliverance from the wrath to come. Such was the case with Jeroboam in the day of his calamity: he sent to the prophet, but his petition was rejected. When the clouds of vengeance gather thick around them, and God pours out his terrors on the wicked like a tempest, they may bethink themselves of their former evil ways, and be for seeking to him whom they have slighted; but how justly may it be said to them, 'Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let

them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.' Jud. x. 14. Jer. ii. 28.

Those who cast God behind their back, know not at what immense distance they may find him in the day of their distress: when they think to heal the breach, it may appear as wide as the sea. Whither then wilt thou go in thy dying moments, when human friendship cannot avail, and God shall be far from thee? If thou hast cast God behind thy back in this world, how wilt thou look him in the face in the world to come? Oh the confusion and the terror that will seize upon the wicked in that day! Rev. vi. 15.

(1) We learn from this subject, that wicked men are infinitely worse than they think themselves to be. If they were asked, one by one, Do you cast God behind your back? How would they resent the question, and say with Hazael, Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?

(2) The nature of sin we see is to increase unto more ungodliness. It was thus with Jeroboam, and thus it is still with every unbeliever. Those who lay the reins upon their lusts, know not whither they will carry them.

(3) If sensible of our departure from God, and are mourning after him, let us not despair, but return unto him, from whom we have deeply revolted. 1 Sam. vii. 2, 3. Deut. iv. 29—31. Think of Manasseh, and think of Paul. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 14. 1 Tim. i. 13, 16.

ORIGIN, PROGRESS, AND END OF TRUE RELIGION.

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.—Philippians iii, 12.

There is an intimate connexion between justification by the righteousness of Christ, and sanctification by the Holy Spirit; for in the same breath in which the apostle prays for the one, he also prays for the other.

Some who are advocates for free justification, deny both the doctrine of sanctification and progressive holiness: but here they are united.

Three things are taught us in the text; namely—the origin—the progress—and the end of true religion.

I. The origin of true religion in the soul: this consists in our being “apprehended of Christ Jesus.”

The word signifies *seizing*, or laying hold of one, or taking him as it were into custody. Thus it is used in Acts xii. 4. 2 Cor. xi. 32.

Here the term is used figuratively, and alludes to Paul's being met

with in his way to Damascus. Acts ix. 4, 5. Thus it is that the Lord meets with poor sinners: sometimes by trying events in providence, as in the case of Manasseh and Ephraim. Jer. xxxi. Sometimes by the word preached, as in the case of Peter's hearers. Acts ii. Some who have attended the word from motives of curiosity, have thus been taken, like Zaccheus, and unable to relinquish their convictions.

Sometimes they have been overtaken at the mouth of the grave, and are apprehended, like the Philippian jailor. Acts xvi. 29, 30. Sometimes by bringing them into difficulties which call their sin to remembrance, as in the case of Joseph's brethren. Sometimes by what is seen in godly people, the heart is taken captive, and 'won by their conversation. Sometimes by solitary reflection, and so gradually as scarcely to know when nor how.

But by whatever means it is, if Christ "apprehends" us, we are taken captive and held fast, not against our will indeed, but are sweetly constrained to surrender up ourselves to him. Christ will not lose his prisoner when he has taken him.

In whatever way our conversion is effected, or by whatever means, God is the first moving cause: true religion does not begin with any act or exercise of ours. Like lost sheep, we do not seek him till he first seeks us.

We should never find the way to God of our own accord; his word indeed exhorts us to seek him, and it is both our interest and our duty to do so: yet every real Christian must say with Paul, 'By the grace of God I am what I am.' He that first loves us, first moves us to himself. Phil. ii. 13. 1 John iv. 10, 19.

II. The progress of true religion: "that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."

Though we are passive in being "apprehended," yet we then become active, and are drawn forth to "apprehend." Hence Paul, when taken captive, cried out, Lord what wouldst thou have me to do?

1. Observe, every thing we feel or do in religion here is *imperfect*.—Repentance, faith, love, obedience, all is imperfect: we know but in part, and we prophecy but in part. Every kind of holiness is the same, and it is a mercy to be assured that such are not rejected. Matt. xii. 20.

3. True religion teaches us *to feel and own it*, instead of pretending to the contrary. If Paul had "not attained," it is presumption in any of us to think we have: all pretences to entire freedom from sin are contrary to the Scriptures, to truth, and to universal experience. They indicate great ignorance of God's holy law, and of our own hearts. We shall always have occasion for that prayer: 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.'

3. Though perfection is not attained, it is of the nature of true religion to be *pursuing after it*. Here are several phrases by which this idea is expressed—'I follow after'—'forgetting the things that are behind'—'reaching forth to those which are before'—'pressing towards the mark.' All these allure to a race, and are expressive of the utmost desire to win the prize.

(1) These terms imply that true religion is something positive : that it not merely consists in our being kept from evil, or remaining barren and unfruitful, but in something absolutely good.

(2) That it is essential to true religion to be progressive, and to follow after perfection, though at a humble distance from the mark. Wo to him that is at ease in Zion, and pleads for imputed sanctification, as well as for imputed righteousness.

(3) That it interests the soul, like one who is running in a race : 'reaching forth.'—These terms describe the earnest breathings of the soul, and its longing after more holiness, like what is expressed in ver. 10.

III. The end of true religion : to "apprehend that for which we are apprehended."

We are apprehended "for" this purpose, that we might win the prize, and lay hold of it. This prize is a holy state ; it is heaven, and eternal life, which believers finally attain.

1. Observe the encouragement for perseverance. Eternal life is before us : think of this in times of temptation, of persecution, and of arduous duty : let that fortify and animate us.

2. The connexion there is between our being effectually called and finally saved, or between grace here and glory hereafter. We are apprehended for this very purpose ; and whom he justifies, them he also glorifies. Psal. lxxxiv. 11. Rom. viii. 30. 2 Cor. v. 5.

DISAGREEMENT AMONGST BRETHREN.

Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.—Psal. cxix. 79.

David had no wish to conciliate the regard of the wicked ; they had often treated him perversely, and he had no hope from them. He therefore resolves to give himself up to meditation and prayer, and leave them to their shame. But it was otherwise respecting the righteous ; them he loved, and was anxious to enjoy their esteem and confidence.

I. Observe the character of the righteous : they are such as "fear God, and have known his testimonies."

This, in new-testament language would amount to much the same as repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. They are such as "fear God."—The fear here intended is not a natural timidity, arising from the want of courage and fortitude ; nor a slavish dread, produced by a consciousness of guilt, and which is often

inflicted as a punishment. Deut. xxviii. 65. In this sense devils believe and tremble, and apostates are filled with fearful apprehensions. Heb. x. 27.

It is not the fear of a slave, but of a child; it is filial and reverential, the fear of the Lord and his goodness. Psal. cxxx. 4. Hos. iii. 5.

Yet it is rather to be understood of the whole of religion, than of any particular part of it, as it influences every duty, and pervades all the conduct. Job i. 1. Eccles. xii. 13.

2. The righteous are such as have "known his testimonies."—Not speculatively, as opposed to total ignorance, for in this way many carnal men have acquired a knowledge of divine truth; but spiritually and experimentally, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The eyes of the understanding are enlightened, and wisdom enters into the soul. Truly to know God's testimonies is to be conformed to them in the spirit of our minds, and to delight in them after the inner man. To know evil is not evil, unless we commit it; and to know good is not good, unless we practise it. 'A good understanding have all they that do his commandments;' but without doing, our knowing is good for nothing. Psal. cxi. 10. Rev. xxii. 14.

II. Owing to the various imperfections of the present state, there may be a temporary distance and estrangement between those to whom this character properly belongs,

This is implied in David's prayer: Let those that fear thee "turn unto me." Some alienation had crept in, and he was anxious to have it removed.

1. Disagreements amongst brethren are sometimes occasioned by evil and unsanctified tempers. Jonah was a good man, but he was irritable, and Peter, but he was bold and self-confident. The same character may combine both amiable and lovely qualities. A gracious heart may exist with a crooked disposition, and a graceless heart may possess much sweetness of natural disposition. Probably the contention between Paul and Barnabas arose out of some unyielding temper, that grace had not entirely subdued; and in the present world this may become the source of much uneasiness.

2. A partial alienation is sometimes produced by a difference of religious sentiments.—We are apt to think that those who do not follow Christ at all, who do not follow him with us; and that those must certainly be wrong, who do not think and speak as we do. Mark ix. 38. Hence proceeds a degree of alienation, which if not guarded against, will issue in a spirit of malevolence. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, and the Samaritans would not receive Jesus into their city, because his face was towards Jerusalem. Luke ix. 53. How direful are the effects of religious intolerance!

3. Unworthy jealousies and suspicions frequently separate chief friends.—God testified of Job that he was a perfect and upright man, yet when his friends came to visit him in his affliction, they suspect him of hypocrisy and deceit. Ananias is afraid of Saul, and suspects the truth of his conversion, till convinced by a vision from heaven: and the disciples were backward to receive him, till Barnabas spoke on his

behalf. They thought him still a persecutor, who was become a preacher. Acts ix. 27. Godly jealousy over ourselves is commendable, but a needless suspicion of others is exceedingly unworthy.

4. Real occasion may nevertheless be given for this alienation, arising out of some defect, either in faith or practice.—There are some, from whose society we are commanded to come out and to be separate; and if any one who is called a brother, is found to be wicked and impenitent, we are required to abstain from religious intercourse, lest we should seem to countenance his vices, or be corrupted by his example. 1 Cor. v. 11.

Whether David was excluded from religious society, in consequence of his sin and fall, or whether he complains only of unkind and injurious treatment, his prayer is equally suitable, and is expressive of his love to the brethren. This conduct to the next observation—

III. That true religion will lead us to desire and pray for a union with the people of God, by what means soever that union may have been interrupted: “Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.”

If David’s friends turn away from him, he will not turn away from them; and if he could not reconcile them by other means, he will beg of God to turn their hearts towards him.

1. The friendship of such as fear God ought to be regarded as an important privilege. It was the honour of Mordecai, that he was ‘accepted of the multitude of his brethren:’ and it is not a little gratifying to enjoy the confidence of those we love. Esther x. 3. Eccles. vii. 1. To have a good report of all, and even of the truth itself, is a most distinguishing privilege. 3 John 12.

2. Society and intercourse with such will naturally become an object of desire to those who are taught of God to love one another. It was the glory of David, though King of Israel, that he was the companion of all them that fear God, and keep his precepts. Psal. xv. 4. Moses also chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin. Heb. xi. 25. With all their imperfections, there is no friendship like theirs.

3. Under the griefs and troubles of life, the society of the godly is often found to be a source of consolation. Paul, amidst his arduous labours, hoped to be comforted by his visit to Rome; and on one occasion was greatly relieved by the visit of a junior minister. Rom. i. 12. Acts xxviii. 15. As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend. 2 Cor. vii. 6.

To conclude—

(1) Let us not wonder, if we have occasion for the psalmist’s prayer. Are we better than Job or David? Yet how heavy were their complaints on this subject, and how much evil they endured from their friends. Job xix. 13—21. Psal. lxxxviii. 8. Christ also was wounded in the house of his friends, and forsaken in the day of trouble. John xvi. 32. God may suffer this to humble and to try us, and to lead us to a more entire dependance on himself.

(2) Whether good men turn to us or not, let us pray that God may not forsake us. The good will of him that dwelt in the bush, more than makes amends for all the ill we may meet with from others. Deut. xxxiii. 16. Let God only turn us to himself, and turn himself to us, and all will be well. Psal. xxv. 16. lxix. 16.

(3) Whatever alienations may take place amongst good people on earth, there will be none in heaven. There Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim; but all shall be harmony, peace, and love.

CHRIST'S INHERITANCE.

Whom he hath appointed heir of all things.—Hebrews i. 2.

Paul's object was to shew the pre-eminence of Christ above all the prophets, above Moses the lawgiver, above Aaron the high priest, and above angels. Yet Christ is not so to be set above them, and distinguished from them, as to be set at variance with them. God who spoke by him spoke also by them. But they were servants; he is the Son. They belonged to God's family, and possessed many privileges; but he is the first-born, and heir of all things.

1. Consider the nature of that honour which is conferred on Christ: "he is appointed heir of all things."

A similar term is applied to Abraham, who is called the "heir of the world." Rom. iv. 13. God gave to him not only Canaan for a possession, but all the ends of the earth, all that should afterwards believe. They should be grafted upon him as the stock, and partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree. Christ much more, of whom Abraham was but a shadow.

More particularly—

1. All that was done under the old testament was preparatory to Christ's kingdom and glory.—It was in his field that the patriarchs and prophets laboured: all the law, both moral and ceremonial, was but a schoolmaster, to lead to the Messiah. To him gave all the prophets witness: their work was to tell of him, and of his coming. Solomon's temple was only the scaffolding to that spiritual building which he should raise. The whole of that dispensation was but a foil to his glory; that was only a shadow, he was the substance: grace and truth came alone by him. The legal economy was but as the years of bondage and slavery: the economy which he introduces is the year of jubilee and liberty. Christ therefore is the "heir" of all their labours.

2. The church under the gospel in his patrimony.—It is given him as his inheritance, Psal. ii. 8: as his seed, Isai. liii. 10. Every believer is given him of the Father, as his reward and crown. If God

so delighted in Abraham as to give him a numerous seed, like the stars of heaven for multitude; much more will he bless his only-begotten Son, in whom his soul delighteth.

3. All authority in the church belongs to him.—His revealed will is the only law in Zion: if his servants take upon them to dictate law to one another, they invade his prerogative. If the church itself should do so, it forgets its proper place and character, which is that of a subject to obey. All we have to do is to learn his will, and perform it: in religious matters, the greatest monarchs are admonished to submit to him. Psal. ii. 10.

4. All authorities and powers in the universe are made subject to him.—He is the Lord of the invisible world: angels and devils are at his command. The decisions of courts and councils, the hearts of the great and the mighty, are in his hands. This affords great consolation to the church in every tempest. Psal. xlv. 1, 2. xcvi. 1, 2. Phil. ii. 10.

5. All events in the system of providence are made subservient to his kingdom and glory.—They are all at work, and at work for him: for him they build up, and for him they pull down.

6. All judgment is committed to him, because he is the Son of man, to whom the pre-eminence belongs.—He is Adam's heir, as well as the heir of God: the fate of men and devils will be fixed by his decree, and they shall receive their sentence from his lips.

II. The ground on which this honour was appointed him.

1. The immediate cause was his obedience and humiliation; of this it is the proper reward. Rom. viii. 17. Phil. ii. 9, 10. Heb. ii. 9.

2. The remote cause was his being the Son of God.—If he had obeyed merely as a servant, it would have been well-pleasing in the sight of God; but it was his obedience as the Son, that God caused him to be so rewarded: this rendered his obedience of such infinite importance. His Sonship and heirship therefore go together. God delights to honour those who honour him, and to bestow favour in a way that proves his way of righteousness. There was no righteousness left in the world to reward: he will therefore send his beloved Son to obey, that he may reward him, and those who believe in him, for his sake.

III. Application of the subject.

1. As the Lord has determined to honour the Saviour, so we must honour him also. This is the very touchstone of christianity: if we have truly embraced it, our hearts will immediately vibrate to this sentiment.

2. The heirship of Christ involves in it the heirship of all those who believe in him: they are joint heirs with him. Rom. viii. 17.

This is the way of obtaining eternal life: not by works, but by faith in him. Christ will not take his portion alone, but will have all his people share it with him: hence he prayed that they all might be

one, and that they might behold his glory. Luke xxii. 21—30. John xvii. 21, 24. How important to be one with him, so as to be joint heirs of all his riches. If joined in heart to Christ, we also become heirs of all things. Rev. xxi. 7.

3. As all judgment is committed to him, those that hate him must bow before him, and be judged by him whom they have dared to despise. This will be an additional ingredient in their punishment. Rev. i. 7. vi. 16.

ELIJAH'S DEFECTION.

What doest thou here, Elijah ?—1 Kings xix. 9.

Courage and intrepidity were the leading qualities in the character of Elijah, yet they both fail him in the hour of trial ; and being intimidated by the threats of Jezebel, he retires into the wilderness, and hides himself in a cave. Here the Lord condescends to pay him a visit, as he did to John in the isle of Patmos, and proposes a question which it was difficult for the prophet to answer. As several important particulars are however suggested by it, we may consider the question in immediate reference to Elijah, and next as applicable to ourselves.

I. Observe the import of the interrogation, in reference to the conduct of Elijah.

Like most others recorded in the Scriptures, it is remarkable for its pungency, and makes its appeal at once to the conscience and the heart.

1. The question at tests the omniscience and omnipresence of God. Psal. cxxxix. 7. Neither the wilderness nor the cave could conceal the offending prophet from the eyes which search all nature through ; and though retired from human society, he was still pervaded with the divine presence. Amos ix. 3.

2. It shows the power and authority of God, in calling his servants to account for their conduct. If Elijah neglect his duty, and desert his station, he must answer for it before his Judge, and neither the dignity of his office, nor the sanctity of his character can exempt him from this appeal. Rom. xiv. 12. He who once said to Adam, Where art thou ; to Eve, What hast thou done ; and to Cain, Where is thy brother Abel ; now demands of Elijah, What doest thou here ? The Lord God of the holy prophets will not suffer them to depart from their commission. How much then does it concern us so to act in every station, as those that must give an account, that we may do it with joy, and not with grief.

3. The interrogation is not merely the language of inquiry, but also of reproof. Elijah was out of the path of duty, and must be warned of his sin and danger.—(1) Instead of magnifying his office, he in effect

rejected it. Like Jonah, he fled from the presence of the Lord, and lay concealed in Horeb, when he ought to have confronted the idolatrous Jezebel, and endeavoured to confirm those convictions which the late miracle had made on the minds of the people.—(2) He betrayed an unworthy fear of man, or rather of a foolish woman, and seems to have lost his confidence in God. With undaunted courage he had lately reproved Ahab, and confounded all the priests of Baal; yet now he is frightened by a passionate queen, and runs away to Horeb.—(3) Elijah's example was highly injurious to the interests of religion. If such a man should flee, what would become of the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal; and how is the truth to be vindicated and supported, amidst so much prevailing degeneracy and corruption. Instead of being "an example to the believers" in a time of trial, the prophet in this instance became their stumbling-block. 1 Tim. iv. 12.

II. The question, "What doest thou here," is applicable to ourselves, and may lead to a profitable enquiry respecting the path of duty.

1. If under a profession of religion we indulge in carnal company, and associate unnecessarily with the men of the world, can we be said to be where God would have us be? If found at the theatre or the card-table, or walking in the counsel of the ungodly, or standing in the way of sinners, may it not be said, 'What doest thou here,' oh vain professor? He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Prov. vi. 27.

2. If we are where it may be lawful for us to be, yet let us consider whether it be either necessary or expedient. If Peter had not been in the hall of the high priest, he had not denied his Lord, yet he could see no harm in going thither. Some professors see no evil in crowding to places of fashionable resort, or in spending their time in unprofitable conversation; but if God were to put the question, 'What doest thou here,' how would they be able to answer him? Instead of doing the work of him that sent them, and doing it with all their might, they are doing nothing, worse than nothing, and wasting that time in idleness which ought to be devoted to the glory of God.

3. If we are where it is both lawful and necessary for us to be, still it is proper for us to inquire what we are doing, and whether or not we are faithfully discharging the duties of our station. (1) If engaged in the necessary pursuits of life, in the shop or in the field, at home or abroad, are we careful to set the Lord always before us; do we mingle a devotional spirit with the ordinary concerns of life, and make every thing subordinate to the interests of religion. 'What *doest* thou here?' Isaac carried on his intercourse with heaven, while walking in the fields; and the church sought her Beloved, not only by night upon her bed, but in the streets, and in the broad ways. Gen. xxiv. 63. Cant. iii. 1, 2. (2) If engaged in the sacred duties of retirement, are we watchful over the frame of our hearts, and do we pray as to our Father who seeth in secret. 'What *do* we do here?'—(3) If in the house of God, do we content ourselves with the means without the end. Do not the fowls come down and devour the sacrifice which was prepared for God, and

the enemy take away the seed which was sown in the heart? Gen. xv. 11. Matt. xiii. 19.

In the case of Elijah we see that the best of men are subject to great infirmities, and therefore let not him that putteth on the armour boast. Yet amidst all his infirmities, God accepted him and honoured him: let us not therefore be unduly discouraged. James v. 17, 18. Let us live in the expectation of giving up our accounts to God, and judge ourselves, that we be not judged. Let us be fully occupied in our Lord's service, that we may not be ashamed before him at his appearing. Matt. xxiv. 46.

AFFLICTIONS ALLEVIATED BY A VIEW OF THE DIVINE MERCY.

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.—Lamentations iii. 22.

The prophet, and the people whom he represents, were at this time in great distress, and the lamentations of the church in captivity are very tenderly described in this chapter.

But though in deep affliction, this was the time to reflect on the divine goodness, and when it could be done to the greatest advantage. Bad as was their present state, and great as was the occasion of their sorrow, it might nevertheless have been worse with them. Instead of being afflicted, and sent into captivity, they might have been utterly consumed; and it is ascribed to the Lord's mercies that they had not their full desert. Such is the tendency of sanctified affliction.

I. Attempt to illustrate the leading sentiment of the text—that notwithstanding all the miseries of the present life, they would be much greater, were it not for the compassion of God towards us.

This will be seen,

1. If we compare our afflictions with our sins and deserts.

So far from complaining of the ills of life, we have cause to wonder that they have not been greatly multiplied. We have many trials,

no doubt: 'I have been afflicted from my youth up may Israel now say:' perhaps but few months or days have passed over us, but some trouble has come upon us. Yet however numerous or complicated, they bear no proportion to the multitude of our sins. If we look back on our past lives, and see how various, how constant have been our departures from God, we shall wonder that our troubles have been so few and so small.

Some of our trials have been heavy, and we have been ready to faint under them: but what are these when compared with the magnitude of our guilt and considering how great an evil sin is in the sight of God, it is owing to his mercy that we are not consumed.

2. If we compare our afflictions with our comforts and enjoyments, we shall arrive at the same conclusion. Discontent dwells

only on the painful part of life, and overlooks the other: yet after all our sorrows and bereavements, how many mercies are left behind, and how many miseries are still prevented!

Life itself, under every disadvantage, is an inestimable blessing: 'why then should a living man complain?'

If providence deprives us of some of our dearest comforts, it leaves us many more than it takes away.

3. Comparing our lot with that of many others, will convince us how greatly we are indebted to the divine goodness. Envy fixes

its eyes on the favourable circumstances of those above us, and finds occasion for discontent: but patience, meekness and love, will contemplate the situation of the more unfortunate, and find occasion for humble gratitude and praise.

If we compare our condition with that of the patient and afflicted Job, who was deprived not of a part, but of all his earthly comforts, and of all of them at once with that of

Jeremiah in the dungeon, and afterwards in captivity with that of the martyrs of our God

with that of the wicked who under all their troubles find no place of refuge

with those who are suffering the vengeance of eternal fire what is it we owe to distinguishing goodness and mercy!

II. Observe that a season of adversity is adapted to enlarge our conceptions of the divine compassion, and so to alleviate our present sufferings.

Comparing our afflictions with our deserts, our comforts, and the sufferings of others, may convince us of the greatness of God's mercy towards us; but it is in a season of adversity that we are best prepared to make this comparison with advantage.

1. Because it is then we are most likely to reflect on our sin and unworthiness.

Afflictions have a tendency to humble us: and if sent for our good, they will lead us to search and try our ways, that we may turn again unto the Lord. Job was led to pray, 'shew me wherefore thou contendest with me:' and afterwards to confess, 'behold I am vile.'

If made to see ourselves unworthy of any mercy, we shall feel thankful for the mercies we enjoy.

2. It is then we are made to see and feel, in how many ways misery might come upon us. When nothing is the matter with us, we think that things are only as they should be: but when afflicted in one way, we easily discern in how many other ways we might have been afflicted. None are so miserable as they might be: he that labours under one trouble, might have twenty more to endure: and when one evil messenger has brought us heavy tidings, another might have followed, and after that another, as in the case of Job.

3. Affliction itself renders mercy both seasonable and welcome. Mercy cannot be tasted or enjoyed, but by the miserable and unworthy.

It is in a season of distress that the doctrines of the gospel speak to us good words and comfortable words, that its promises appear to be exceeding great and precious, and its consolations are found to be

neither few nor small. Every token for good is now received with grateful satisfaction, and to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

Do we realize this important truth? It is true, indeed, that 'it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed;' but the sentiment is properly felt only by a few. Not every one, nor every one that is afflicted, can cordially join in the language of our text.

If we provoke the wrath of God, and are consumed by him at last, all our present mercies will aggravate our guilt, and increase our future misery.

THE BELIEVER'S TRIUMPH.

All nations compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. They compassed me about, yea, they compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns; for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.—Psalm cxvi. 10—12.

This highly animated passage is expressive of David's victories over his numerous enemies, in the establishment of the kingdom of Israel. It is also prefigurative of the triumphs of the Redeemer, of whom he was an eminent type; of the final establishment of his spiritual empire, and the victory of all his saints.

I. The description given of David's enemies, and of the enemies of the church of God.

1. Their number: "all nations." The saints have but few friends, and many opposers; and thus had David. Psal. xxv. 19. The children of Israel were beset with numerous adversaries, in their passage through the wilderness; and after they came to the possession of Canaan, their numbers were increased. Not only the Philistines, the Moabites, the Amonites, their near neighbours, made war upon them, but also the Assyrians and the Babylonians, who were at a greater distance. Deut. vii. 1. Thus also it is with all the saints; not only are they attacked by numerous hosts of domestic and internal foes, by 'whole nations' of vain and sinful thoughts, by multitudes of fleshly and worldly lusts; but by all the powers of darkness, and legions of wicked and unreasonable men, who act in subserviency to those spiritual wickednesses in high places. Ephes. vi. 12.

2. Their diligence and activity: "they compassed me about, yea, they compassed me about." Beset on every side, there seemed to be no way of escape. Such, frequently, was David's situation; such the situation of the church, and of individual believers in all ages of the world. 2 Chron. xviii. 31. —Psal. xxii. 12, 16. But God will

afford protection and support, proportioned to their difficulties. Psal. v. 12. xxxii. 10. He made such a hedge round about Job as none of his enemies could penetrate, without divine permission. 1 Cor. x. 13.

3. Their rage and malignity. Not only as numerous, but as vexatious and annoying as a swarm of "bees," shooting their envenomed sting, and creating incessant pain and anguish. Such is their fury, that they are like a "fire of thorns" burning fiercely for a time, though but short, and threatening with utter destruction.

II. The confidence with which David anticipated a final victory :—
 "But in the name of the Lord will I destroy them."

The language is strong and decisive : not only would he fight and conquer, but totally exterminate all his enemies : and nothing short of this would satisfy the Christian hero, who has entered into a similar conflict.

The destroyers of God's people shall themselves be utterly destroyed. Though they burn with rage and fury, they shall be "quenched as the fire of thorns," and shall contribute to their own destruction. The opposition they give, may be fierce and sudden, but it will soon be over. Job xviii. 5, 16. While they say with Pharaoh, 'I will pursue, I will overtake ; they sink like lead in the mighty waters.' Exod. xv. 9.

David was so confident of this, that he anticipates the victory as already accomplished : "they are quenched as the fire of thorns," and all their fury and rage has ceased.

Let us notice the grounds of this heroic confidence—

1. It was founded on a knowledge of the divine perfections, as engaged in the defence of truth and righteousness. Like the cloudy pillar in the wilderness, which turned its bright side towards the Israelites, while it was nothing but darkness to their enemies, the attributes of the divine nature afford to the righteous protection and support, but threaten the wicked with everlasting destruction : and here it was that David found his security and peace. Psal. xviii. 1—3, 32—34. xxvii. 1—3.

2. Past experience of the divine goodness and care, tended also to strengthen this confidence. He that had delivered him from the paw of the lion and the bear, from the hands of Saul, and from the uncircumcised Philistine, would enable him to triumph over all his enemies. Psal. lxxvii. 10, 11. 1 Sam. xvii. 27. This also was the confidence of Paul, and is the hope and the strength of all believers. 2 Cor. i. 1—10.

3. The covenant and promises of God were the ground of David's oath and confidence, both in life and in death. 2 Sam. xxii. 1—3. xxiii. 5. Psal. cxii. 8. And in every arduous enterprise he went forth in the strength of the Lord God. Psal. lix. 17. lxxi. 16.

4. A consciousness that he was acting immediately under divine authority, and by divine direction, confirmed his hopes of success. He had no wisdom, no strength of his own, by which to achieve the victory : "the name of the Lord" was his strength and his shield. 2 Chron. xx. 12. 1 Sam. xvii. 45. If our enemies are mighty, our Redeemer is stronger than they : and however numerous, there are more for us than can be against us. 1 John iv. 4.

5. He knew that the Lord had doomed his enemies, and the enemies of Christ, to utter destruction, and might well therefore triumph over them. Satan, the world, and sin, and death are vanquished foes, and all believers may proclaim the victory. Rom. xvi. 20. John xvi. 33. Col. ii. 14, 15. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

THE LORD'S TABLE.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies : thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.—Psalm xxiii. 5.

This psalm was probably written by David when quietly seated on his throne, after the Lord had delivered him from all his enemies round about. It is full of holy exultation. In the former part he dwells on the character of Jehovah as his Shepherd ; and having been in that capacity himself, he fully understood its import. In the latter part of the psalm he changes the figure, and celebrates the mercy and the goodness of God as a Father.

The gratulations in the text would very well suit such a time as that of David's bringing up the ark from the house of Obededom to the city of David with gladness of heart, and when he made a great feast to all the people. 2 Sam. vi. 15—19. Or when the promise of establishing his kingdom was delivered to him by Nathan the prophet : ver. 16.

And as it was common at feasts to anoint the head with ointment, so this circumstance is referred to in the text, as well as the abundant provisions which were prepared on such occasions : “Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.”

I. Enquire whether the Lord has not prepared a table for us, as well as for David and Israel.

The rest of the psalm is applicable to Christians, and so is the passage before us.

1. All the feasts under the law were little when compared with what was foretold should take place under the gospel. Isai. xxv. 6. This privilege is ours ; and we have a better table, and a richer feast than they. Matt. xxii.

2. Their greatest feasts were sacrificial : such were the feasts made by David, and Hezekiah. 2 Chron. xxx. 21—26. The feast also which God has prepared for us in the gospel is of this kind, but of a far greater and better sacrifice than that of bullocks and of rams. John vi. 54—56.

3. The best part of David's table would consist of what God promised him respecting the Messiah. This it was that made his heart rejoice, even on a dying bed. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. This also is the feast which God prepares for us, even the sure mercies of David. Isai. lv. 2, 3.

4. David's table was divinely prepared: "*Thou preparest*"

Such also is ours: eye hath not seen what 'God hath prepared' for them that love him. It was prepared too, before the foundation of the world: at an infinite expense, even the death of Jesus.

5. His table was abundantly prepared, and covered with the richest dainties: "my cup runneth over." So also is ours: God hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, and brought his own fulness to make the bliss complete. Ephes. i. 3. iii. 19.

6. It was also crowned with social joy, for he did not feast alone: the feast prepared for him was also prepared for all Israel, to whom he sent pieces of flesh and flagons of wine. Ours also is of this description: the joy of the Christian is mingled with that of his brethren, who also partake with him; and their joy has seldom risen higher than when at the table which the Lord has provided for them, especially when they truly enter into its spirit and design.

7. The Jewish table consisted of foretastes of good things to come: all was typical of gospel times. Ours too is much the same: it is only preparatory to the feast above.

II. The circumstance which heightened the mercy in David's case will also apply to us.

Thou preparest a table before me "in the presence of mine enemies;" notwithstanding all their envy, and all their rage.

1. Observe the restraint which God is often pleased to lay upon the enemies of his church and people, so that they shall not be able to interrupt their peace and joy. Considering the enmity existing between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, it is not a little wonderful that we are permitted to enjoy such privileges. In some ages of the world, God's people have had to seek their bread at the peril of their lives, in woods and dens and caves of the earth, and under the shadows of the night. But Israel enjoyed security in the times of David, every man sitting under his own vine, and under his fig-tree. So it is with us, and our table continues to be spread 'in the presence of our enemies.'

2. Internal peace and joy have been afforded to Christians, even when those restraints have been taken off. In the world ye shall have tribulation; 'but in me ye shall have peace;' and primitive believers rejoiced even in tribulation. Paul and Silas sang praises at midnight, and in a prison. How mortifying was this to their persecutors; and to Satan, for Job to say, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'

The table which God has prepared, affords encouragement to sinners; for they are all invited to partake of it. Isai. lv. 1, 2. To believers it furnishes matter for gratitude, and a full heart becomes a full cup.

PREREQUISITES FOR COMMUNION WITH GOD.

Can two walk together, except they be agreed?—Amos iii. 3.

To walk with God, and God with us, is the first object to be desired: every thing short of it is vanity. That God should walk with us, so as to bless and prosper us in all our undertakings, may be the object of general desire: this was the wish of Israel in their most degenerated state, and they seem to think it hard that he would not. But it could not be: God appeals as it were to the first principles of all society and friendship amongst men. In religious connexions, and in all civil contracts between nations, there must be some congeniality, or there can be no friendship.

The language of the text is applicable to us, as well as to Israel. We are apt to think that God might be our friend, and show us favour; but in order to this we must be his friend, or it cannot be.

I. Consider what is included in God and man walking together.

Doubtless the expression is figurative, but it conveys the idea of communion: it was true of Enoch and Noah, who also walked with God, and had fellowship with him.

1. It denotes something very different from his common mercies. His tender mercies are over all his works, and he is so mindful of man that he loads him daily with benefits: but notwithstanding all this, we may still live without God in the world, and have no fellowship with him. It is something more than common favour; and peculiar only to his people. Psal. cvi. 4, 5.

2. It is something more than divine good-will. David loved Absalom, though he had rebelled against him, and wished his life to be spared. God so loved us as to give his only-begotten Son, and that while we were yet enemies: but there is no fellowship between God and sinners, neither indeed can there be. 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

3. In its fullest sense it includes something more than the mere existence of true religion on our part. There may be hindrances to our walking with God, though on the whole we are his servants: and too much will be found in every one that is godly, to prevent intimate communion with him.

4. It is expressive of that free and condescending manifestation of his love, with which he indulges those who walk near to him. God delights to manifest himself graciously, where it can be done consistently. He walked with man in innocence; with his servants after the fall, and with believers in Christ Jesus. Rom. v. 1.

II. What is necessary in order to it: our being "agreed."

God walks with all holy beings, as he did with man at first: but sinful men do not agree with him.

1. Having all grievously offended against him, there requires a reconciliation.

God could not walk with Israel till Moses interferred: nor with Job's friends, till he had offered sacrifices and intercessions on their behalf. Exod. xxxiii. 14—17. Job xlii. 8, 9.

Nor can the Lord walk with any sinner on earth, without the intervention of a Mediator, who is become our peace, and hath made both one. God has reconciled us unto himself by the blood of the cross, and there is no fellowship with a fallen creature but through him. 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

God will hear no prayer, but for the Redeemer's sake; will accept no offering but by faith in him; he will bestow no blessings but through him alone. Heb. ix. 22. xi. 6.

2. Being by nature of a mind opposite to God, there requires to be a renewal of it, so as to become of another spirit.

We are not agreed with him: man's ideas of things are at variance with God's thoughts, and all his feelings towards him.

We must be brought to think and feel as he does, before we can walk together.

God regards his own honour supremely, in which is involved the well being of the universe; but man regards himself as the chief good.

God regards his Son as the object of his supreme delight: but man sees neither form nor comeliness in him.

God views sin as an evil and a bitter thing, but man as a light thing: hence he can see no glory in the way of salvation.

God views the world as less than nothing, and vanity, but man makes it his all in all.

God loves righteousness for its own sake, but man only for its effects.

Such a contrariety requires us to be born again, or there can be no communion.

We must be reconciled to God; and if reconciled through the death of his Son, then we may walk together.

3. Man is by nature impure, and God is infinitely holy: there can therefore be no considerable degree of fellowship with him, without our habitually walking as in his sight.

Some indeed will boast of great enjoyments, while strangers to holiness and intimate converse with God; but we may expect that if we walk contrary to God, he will walk contrary to us. Lev. xxvi. 23, 34.

We may learn hence—

(1) That as Christ is the only medium of reconciliation, so faith in him is the only way of access to God, and of acceptance with him.

(2) Unless we walk with God in this world, we shall never dwell with him in the world to come.

MARY AT THE SEPULCHRE.

Mary stood without at the Sepulchre weeping.—John xx. 11.

Mary Magdalene was one of the first that sought the crucified Redeemer, and the first that found him after his resurrection. Peter and

John, at her request had visited the sepulchre; but seeing nothing but the linen clothes lying they quickly returned. Mary, who came to the spot before the dawning of the day, still kept her station, and continued weeping at the door of the sepulchre.

I. Consider the sources of her grief.

Had she known all that had come to pass, she would have had reason to rejoice, for the Lord was actually risen; but at present she mourns an absent and crucified Saviour, and numberless recollections augment her grief.

1. She remembers the endearing converse she once enjoyed, the many instructions and favours she had received from her adored Lord, and her soul melts at the thought, that these seasons are to return no more. Christ had cast seven devils out of her, and spoke peace and pardon, when Simon the pharisee wished to have her condemned. She had wept at the Saviour's feet, and washed them with her tears; she had much forgiven, and therefore she loved much. Luke vii. 47. If the Ephesian elders wept at Paul's departure, well might Mary weep, that she should behold the face of Jesus no more. Isai. xxxviii. 11. What in heaven or on earth can comfort a sorrowful disciple, but the presence of the Lord. Psal. lxxii. 25.

2. The remembrance of his bitter agonies and death upon the cross, added another ingredient to the cup of sorrow, and made it overflow. Mary was present at the crucifixion, stood near the cross, witnessed the shame, the ignominy, the reproach with which her blessed Lord was treated; beheld his agonies, and heard his dying cry; and still she remembers the wormwood and the gall. John xix. 25. Heaven from above, and hell from beneath, had been stirred up against him, and the awful spectacle had filled the whole creation with terror and dismay. Mary had looked on him whom they had pierced, and now she mourns and is in bitterness, as for an only son. Psal. lxix. 9. Zech. xii. 10.

3. Mary had to lament that she was deprived of the opportunity of shewing the last token of regard to her departed Lord, whom she now expected to see no more. She had brought a quantity of spices to anoint the sacred body, but found the tomb empty; and the disappointment melts her into tears. Mark xvi. 1. This is a feeling which frequently accompanies the departure of earthly friends; the omission of some duty, or some expression of tenderness, is remembered with exquisite regret.

4. Imagining that the body of Jesus was stolen from the sepulchre, Mary is distressed at the indignities that might be offered, and the triumphs that would be obtained by the enemies of Christ, who wanted to falsify his prediction, that in three days he would rise again. Matt. xxvii. 63, 64. She therefore addresses herself to a person whom she thought to be the gardener, wishing to have the sacred relic committed to her trust. John xx. 15. Her love was equal to the undertaking, and she would find the means of conveying it to a place of safety. With tears she seeks him whom her soul loveth, and could not be satisfied till she had found him.

II. Observe the place where she vented her grief: "Mary stood at the sepulchre" weeping.

1. This shows the sincerity and fervour of her love. Mary might have wept at home, and indulged her grief in secret, as did the rest of the disciples: but she was drawn to the sacred spot by the power of her attachment; and to be near the redeemer, both in life and in death, was all the happiness she knew. A sight of the cross had extinguished every worldly affection, and the sepulchre contained her dearest treasure, and her only hope.

2. The station she occupied was expressive of her courage and resolution. It was a dreadful post of observation for a female to be standing without, at the door of the sepulchre, amidst the darkness of the night, and in presence of the sentinels who watched and guarded the sacred spot; but the love that brought her there, rendered her insensible to every danger. Peter and John had retired, and left her alone, and there now seemed no probability of succeeding in the object of her visit: yet neither life nor death could separate her from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. Her constancy and perseverance were truly admirable. Uninfluenced by the example of the brethren, and unawed by the dangers which surrounded her, she waited as the solemn hours passed, a stationary mourner at the door of the sepulchre, still hoping to see her beloved Lord, and if she cannot enjoy his presence, she will stay and weep over his grave. But she was not disappointed: weeping may continue for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. Psal. xxx. 5.

(1) All who truly seek the Saviour, seek him sorrowing. The first operation of true religion is to soften and melt the heart, and to draw it forth in ardent aspirations after the blessed Redeemer.

(2) Though disappointed of finding him where he has promised his presence, and where he has often met with us and blessed us, we are still encouraged to persevere, knowing that they shall not be ashamed who wait for him. Isai. xxx. 18. xlix. 23.

MARY AT THE SEPULCHRE.

And as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white, sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.—John xx. 11, 12.

Modern travellers who have visited Jerusalem, describe the holy sepulchre, hewn out of a rock, as being small and low, not more than eight feet square, with a contracted entrance, and several steps descending into it; which accounts for the position which Mary occupied, "stooping down and looking in." Scarcely believing it possible that

the tomb should be deserted, she pried with eager curiosity, as the day dawned upon the sacred spot.

I. Try to gather a little instruction from her example.

1. Those who would see Jesus must seek him with all lowliness of mind, and with many tears. God will bring those low, for whom mercy is intended; and those who have obtained mercy will be willing to be made low. He will bring down the high tree, and dry up the green tree. Ezek. xvii. 24. Luke xviii. 14.

2. Jesus must be sought where he is only to be found. Mary had seen him conveyed to the sepulchre after his crucifixion, and thither she repairs by morning light. We are invited to seek him under more auspicious circumstances, not among the dead, but as living and reigning at the right hand of God; as present in his ordinances, and in the assemblies of his saints. Psal. xxvii. 4. lxiii. 1, 2.

3. Like Mary we must seek the Lord with diligence and patience, and not leave off seeking till we find him. There must not only be a looking but a waiting for him, until he will be gracious. Psal. v. 3. xxvii. 14. cxxiii. 3. Isai. xxvi. 8.

II. The encouragement arising from her success: she "seeth two angels in white, sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain."

Mary did not immediately find the Saviour, it is true; but she found his attendants, and he himself was not far off.

At the birth of Christ a multitude of the heavenly host appeared, but at his resurrection only "two," to bear witness of the fact, and these two were sufficient.

They were clothed "in white," the emblem of purity and innocence, and also of glory and majesty. Rev. xix. 8. Psal. civ. 1, 2.

Like the cherubims which stood at each end of the ark, and covered the mercy seat, the angels were "sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." Neither the watch, the stone, nor the seal could bar their entrance; and while wrapt in wonder and astonishment to behold the Prince of life lying in the shades of death, they guarded the sacred spot from all intrusion.

1. Observe here, angels love to be where Christ is, not only in heaven, but also in the sepulchre; and their honour consists in being his ministering servants. Worship him, all ye gods. Psal. xcvi. 7. Heb. i. 6. They attended at his incarnation, ministered to him in the wilderness, comforted him in the garden, and visited him in the grave. Oh that we did but love Christ as the angels do!

2. The resurrection of Christ being witnessed by the angels, shews that the God of peace was fully satisfied with the atonement he had offered or he would not have sent them to roll away the stone, and open the prison door. When he had made his soul an offering for sin, he was to be 'taken from prison and from judgment;' and the angels are now present to perform their office. Isai. liii. 8.

3. Angels delight not only to honour Christ, but to comfort his sorrowful disciples; and in the present instance they were sent on both these errands. Mary was weeping at the sepulchre, and they are there to comfort her. John xx. 13. Matt. xxviii. 5. Dan. ix. 22. Heb. i. 14.

4. If seeking souls do not immediately find, yet the Lord will strengthen and encourage them, so that they shall not seek in vain. Mary sought Jesus, and found the angels; while Peter and John, who ran to the sepulchre, but did not wait, found nothing but a napkin. But Mary still waited and wept, and first the angels appear, and then the Saviour. God's goings forth are as the morning, and lesser mercies prepare the way for greater ones. Hos. vi. 3.

5. Weeping saints are often the most eminent, and shall in the end be most joyful. Jacob wept, and made supplication. Hos. xii. 4. Jeremiah wept in secret places for the sins of others. Jer. xiii. 17. David's tears were his meat day and night. Psal. xlii. 3. And Mary wept. This world is a Bochim, a place of weeping; and if we knew all the occasions we had to weep, we should be swallowed up of grief. It would be well, however, if we could weep more for sin, and more after the Saviour: then we may hope that our sorrow shall be turned into joy. John xvi. 20.



PAUL'S CONSTANCY.

There came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus: and when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost; so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep, and to break my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.—Acts xxi. 10—14.

It is in part the design of the sacred Scriptures, to furnish us with great examples, in which we may see the doctrine they teach reduced to practice, and see it in all its life and power.

In Paul we have an instance of the wonderful efficacy of divine grace. What a change is here, from what he once was; the poor empty pharisee, and violent persecutor, is now prepared to suffer martyrdom.

He was also in this an eminent follower of Christ: he met his death with constancy, and would not be turned aside from the path of duty. He went up to Jerusalem with his heart full of tenderness, but nothing could shake his resolution.

I. Notice a few particulars in the Constancy of Paul.

1. Its warrant. We might think he was rash: his friends thought so. In common cases we are not to run in the way of persecution, nor to go out of our way to meet the cross. But Paul was in the way, and had only to take it up, as Christ had done before him. He had a special direction to go up to Jerusalem, though he was given to expect persecution as the consequence. Acts xix. 21. He knew not every particular, but thus much, that he should see the churches in Asia no more: ch. xx. 25. We must keep the path of duty, whatever be the consequences.

2. The trial of it. Two things in particular tended to shake his constancy. (1) The warning was of God. Agabus, however, did not pretend to command him in the name of the Lord not to go up to Jerusalem; though if he had, Paul would not have turned aside, as the old prophet did. 1 Kings xviii. (2) The tender affection of his friends. He could stand threatenings and dangers, but tears and tenderness went to "break his heart." These also proceeded from love to him, and to the churches of Christ: but he is firm amidst it all.

3. Its strength. They told him of bonds: he was ready for more than bonds; he was prepared to "die," Liberty is sweet; life is still more so; but Christ is dearer than all. The motive urged by his friends was touching: the good of the churches was still more so. This consideration once caused him to be in a strait, whether to abide, or depart and be with Jesus: but here the will of God is plain, and therefore he is ready. Nor was this a sudden flash of zeal; it continued to the end of life. 2 Tim. iv. 6.

4. The motive which induced it. The love of Jesus, "the name of the Lord Jesus:" this is true religion. It is difficult to conceive of the ideas which occupied his mind, while uttering these words: his heart is full, as the words themselves imply. No doubt he would think of the Lord Jesus once 'going up to Jerusalem' for him: 'he loved me, and gave himself for me.' He had also himself been a persecutor of that 'name,' and had been silenced by an overwhelming question: 'Why persecutest thou me? Christ had now honoured him as the almoner of his riches among the gentiles: 'Unto me is this grace given.' He had witnessed the blessed efficacy of that name, in saving thousands and thousands of sinners. Hence his resolution to die proclaiming it.

5. The amiable submission of his friends must not pass unnoticed. They did not know at first what the will of the Lord was in this matter: but when this was declared, they gave him up, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.' This also is true religion: it is like Christ himself. Not my will, but thine be done.

II. Improvement.

1. Let us be thankful for the protection we enjoy, and that we are shielded from the violence of wicked and unreasonable men. Our table is spread in the sight of all our enemies: we can go and come, without fear of persecution and of martyrdom.—Psal. xvi. 5, 6.

2. Learn the importance of being prepared for the same things.

Having been accustomed to peace and safety, we have as it were forgotten some of the first principles of the gospel: 'deny thyself, and take up thy cross, and follow me.' Matt. xix. 29. 1 Cor. xv. 30, 31.

Yet we are as soldiers in a state of requisition, and ought to be prepared for action. Ephes. vi. 14.

3. Is it not for want of entering more fully into the spirit of the gospel, that Christ is denied in far less trials than those which primitive believers had to endure; and that religion is often made to give place to the fear of man, the love of the world, and the love of ease.

4. See wherein the very essence of Christianity consists: it is doing what we do in religion "for the name of the Lord Jesus." It is for him to be dearer to us than liberty or life itself. Acts xx. 24. Phil. iii. 8.

DANGER OF EVIL THOUGHTS.

If thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.—
Proverbs xxx. 32.

The book of Proverbs is commonly ascribed to Solomon, as the book of Psalms is to David, but as many of the Psalms were written by other of the prophets, so were the proverbs. This in particular is said to be written by Agur. Who he was is uncertain, but he was a good man, and a prophet.

The Scriptures we see meet sin in every direction: they guard us against the admission of evil, both in deed and in thought. But there are cases, and many too, in which the evil has already entered: here it meets and repels its progress. "If thou hast thought evil," or even conceived the design in thy heart, "lay thine hand upon thy mouth," for there is cause of humiliation and deep abasement.

I. Notice a few of the evil thoughts to which our depraved minds are subject.

The caution supposes that evil thoughts, purposes, and designs, are apt to spring up in the minds of men; and it is but too true, that our hearts are a fruitful soil for them. Evil thoughts are among the things which proceed out of an evil heart; and it is remarkable, that they are mentioned as the first in the train. Matt. xv. 19. They are the buddings of those evils which follow after; and hence the importance of the exhortation in the text.

It is not possible to enumerate those evil thoughts that may arise in the mind; but they may be distinguished into three classes; namely—Those that have God and religion for their object—those which respect ourselves—and those which respect others. These are—impious

thoughts—vain thoughts—and injurious thoughts. It is true they may be greatly intermixed, yet there is some difference between them.

1. Impious thoughts, or such as have God and religion for their object. Alas, many hearts are full of atheism and impiety; and all have too much of it.

How many hard thoughts have been entertained of God and his government—of his providence and even of his grace, as if his ways were unequal.

There is an awful account to be given of these. Jude 15. They are called 'sayings the speeches,' but they had their origin in thoughts, and we are all in danger of being assailed by this sort of impiety.

Of this kind was the thought of Jeroboam. 1 Kings xii. 26. Unbelief and carnal policy, which first took possession of the mind, led on to gross idolatry.

All the heresies and corruptions in religion have originated from hence. It was from such thoughts that the slothful servant turned his back on God's service: and many there are who do it still. Matt. xxv. 24.

If any such hard and unbelieving thoughts have entered our minds, let us lay our hand upon our mouth and be humbled for them.

2. Vain thoughts, or those which consist in thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think: this is 'the pride of life.' It was a part of the first transgression, to imagine they should 'be as gods.'

It was such thoughts as these that led Haman to treat Mordecai with derision and scorn, and to seek the ruin of the nation; and they still move conquerors and rulers to accomplish the destruction of independent states.

These same kind of thoughts brought on the ruin of Haman at last, and they have effected the ruin of many a vain man since. Esther vi. 6.

Such thoughts as these lie at the foundation of our distance from God; for he is high unto the lowly, but the proud he beholdeth afar off. Also of disagreements amongst men; for by pride cometh contention.

Let us be humble for such vanity, if it has been indulged; and let us lay our hand upon our mouth.

3. Injurious thoughts, or those which immediately respect others. Does a selfish spirit possess us: do we think how we may overreach another, and gain an undue advantage? Let us remember what is written in our text.

Perhaps some one has displeased you, and you are thinking how you may be revenged; in this originated the envy and cruelty of Joseph's brethren, in seeking to destroy or sell him for a slave.

From hence arose the destruction of Pharaoh and his host, whose wish it was to oppress and enslave the Israelites.

Thinking how to injure the character of another, entertaining prejudices to his disadvantage, or having unkind thoughts towards the poor, is evil in the sight of God, and he will call us to account. Deut. xv. 9.

II. Explain and enforce the counsel that is given us: "lay thine hand upon thy mouth."

This expressive phrase denotes repentance and holy shame, as in Lev. xiii. 45. Job xl. 4. Also guarding the door of our lips, that evil thoughts may not be uttered. Psal. cxli. 3.

The first is a sin

against God; the other against both God and man; and they gather strength by exercise.

Now it is of importance that this advice be complied with because—

1. The very existence of evil thoughts, without being called into action, ought to cover us with shame: it is the disgrace of our nature to have such a corrupt fountain within us.

2. The effects that would follow upon evil thoughts, if not prevented, would involve us in present ruin, as well as in that which is eternal. Remember Haman and Judas, and the consequences of their pride and covetousness.

3. What grace is needful to pardon such a multitude of sins, and to cleanse us from them. Zech. xiii. 1.

CHRISTIAN EDIFICATION.

Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.—2 Peter i. 5—8.

Great things are here ascribed to the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, ver. 2: ‘grace and peace are hereby multiplied.’ All things pertaining to life and godliness are derived from hence, ver. 3. By it we are interested in exceeding great and precious promises, ver. 4. Yet we must not rest in knowledge, but add to it what is recommended in our text.

I. Observe what is here supposed to be the foundation of the Christian character, even “faith.”

Peter had before spoken of faith, and ascribed to it two qualities; namely, “its preciousness,” verse 1, as having relation to a precious Saviour; and its being the same in all good men, under whatever dispensation they have lived, and whether they be weak or strong in faith: it still is “like” precious faith “with us.”

The term “add” to your faith, denotes that faith must be first, as the foundation of all the rest; and indeed it is this which forms the basis of the Christian character. Jude 20.

More particularly, observe—

1. Nothing but faith will support the building. What is the virtue of heathens, and unconverted men? What is the virtue of Jews and deists in modern times; or of nominal Christians? It is destitute of all the graces mentioned in our text: it has nothing of temperance, patience, godliness, kindness, or charity belonging to it.

All attempts to build up men in holiness without faith, are utterly vain : we may build, but it must come down again. Faith in the Son of God is the foundation of all.

2. Faith is sufficient for this purpose : it is the root from whence all the graces grow, and the spring which waters and makes them fruitful. —No sooner did the murderous Jews believe in him whom they had crucified, than all these graces began to appear. Acts ii. The profligate heathens the same ; and thus it is to this day. When a sinner ready to perish embraces the gospel, he is from thence a new creature, cast in a new mould. Let him cease to oppose the gospel, and begin to obey it from the heart, and he becomes the servant of God, and his fruit unto holiness. Rom. vi. 17—22.

II. Notice what is to be built on this foundation, or added to it.

“Giving all diligence.” We must not stop at faith, for faith without works is dead : it is inoperative, and has no influence on the life. Such however is the faith of multitudes of nominal Christians, and of many also who make an open profession of religion.

“Giving all diligence.” This implies that we shall not grow in grace, without care and close attention. Sloth and carnal ease will reduce our souls to a state like that of the vineyard of the sluggard, which is overgrown with weeds. It is in grace as in nature ; though the utmost diligence will fail without the blessing of God, yet neither will he give his blessing without diligence : the diligent soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall also himself be watered. Prov. xi. 25. xiii. 4. Grace will not grow spontaneously ; but must be watched and watered, by prayer and holy carefulness. Isai. xxvii. 3.

More particularly—

1. The first stone to be laid on your holy faith is “virtue.”

We use this word for moral excellence in general, as distinguished from vice, or what is unlovely ; but seems here to have a more specific meaning.

It is a military term, and denotes courage, fortitude or resolution : if it were what is generally meant by virtue, it would include all that follow in the text, and so could not be distinguished from them.

Give all diligence, that he may not be feeble, but strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus : not like the fearful and unbelieving, but like those who took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Like Peter and John, who waxed bold to speak the word of the Lord, or like him who witnessed a good confession.

2. The next is “knowledge.”

This is to regulate virtue or courage ; energy and zeal without knowledge, would be dangerous. Even love itself requires to be under its direction. Phil. i. 9. Courage in a soldier, without knowledge to guide it, would be misapplied : let all your zeal and energy therefore be under the regulation of God’s word. As soldiers, know your dangers in order to avoid them ; your enemies and their devices, to be able to meet and overcome them ; your obligations, in order to fulfil them. In times of trial, heaven ‘expects every man to do his duty.’

3. "Temperance." This denotes the right government of the appetites and passions. Also in giving to others admonition and reproof, so as to be angry and sin not. Psal. cxli. 5. Our Lord himself affords a kind and gentle reproof, in his conduct towards his disciples; and Paul in dealing with the Corinthians. Gal. vi. 1. 1 Cor. iv. 21. Ephes. iv. 31, 32.

4. To these must also be added "patience," which denotes the enduring of evil; as afflictions, persecutions, and reproaches; and in this we have the example of Christ. 1 Pet. ii. 20—23. Also in waiting for the coming of the Lord. James v. 7. 1 Thes. i. 10.

5. "Godliness," or piety. This is to be like God, to bear his image, to be of his mind, to love him, fear him, and keep his glory in view. This runs through the whole of the Christian character.

6. "Brotherly kindness." This is that sweet disposition which feels towards the poorest Christian as a brother, in sympathising, and in rejoicing with him. Col. iii. 12. James i. 9, 10.

7. "Charity," or that candid disposition which thinketh no evil; which puts the best possible construction on the conduct and actions of others, and which envieth not a spirit of meekness and love. 1 Cor. xiii.

III. The necessity of these additions, that we may "neither be barren nor unfruitful."

It is here supposed that we may possess some knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and yet be very barren withal: and if the building be not raised in the manner that is here expressed, we shall be so.

1. That we be "not barren." A person may be said to be barren when he bears no fruit, or when there is nothing positive in his religion; a sort of negative character. But nothing merely negative will do: he has apparently put off the old man, but not put on the new: he was once like a wilderness, full of briars and thorns; and now is like a barren heath. Jer. xvii. 5, 6. Matt. xii. 44.

2. That we be "not unfruitful." A person is unfruitful when he bears little fruit, and barren when he bears none at all; a field may have some fruit, and yet not be fruitful. God requires not merely the existence of true religion in the heart, but that it should grow exceedingly: and that "these things should be in us, and abound." 2 Thess. i. 11. 2 Pet. iii. 18.

CLOSING SCENE OF OUR SAVIOUR'S LIFE.

Peter followed him afar off, unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants to see the end.—Matthew xxvi. 58.

Every thing pertaining to Christ is interesting, especially what relates to his death; and this is what we are now to contemplate.

We are not sure that Peter was to blame for doing as he did. He was wrong in lifting up his sword to defend his Master, and wrong afterwards in denying him: but his following him "to see the end" was very natural. He had trusted every thing in his hands; he could not be indifferent; he might think that Jesus would escape from his enemies by miracle; or if not, he must go and see. Every thing is now at stake, now at issue; and he could not tell the consequences.

But having used his sword, and thereby exposed himself to danger, it was natural for him to "follow afar off," lest he should be discovered and apprehended.

We shall take occasion from the passage to consider a few particulars concerning the last end of our Lord upon earth; and as Peter followed to see the end, let us do the same. We have also greater advantages than he had for this purpose, with the gospel in our hands, and all the mystery revealed.

1. His way was dark and doubtful: ours is clear and certain. He viewed the matter in prospect, we view it as past. He went to see what the end would be, but we to see what it was. He was under a cloud, but we can see through the cloud.

2. His situation was dangerous, as it exposed him to the greatest temptation; but ours is perfectly safe. The more we dwell on this subject, the better it will be for us, and the more shall we be armed against temptation.

Let us then "see the end" in three respects—

1. With regard to the persecutors of our Lord, to see what will become of them.

Having begun, they went on, setting themselves against the Lord and against his anointed. They condemned him in form; and when Judas returned from the council, they went on with the work. He made a confession of betraying innocent blood, but this did not hinder their proceeding. "See thou to that," said they; and they never stopped till they put the Saviour to death. The first authorities in the nation gave their sanction, and those who were the representatives of the only people upon earth, whom God had called his own: the fact is affecting.

But "the end" is dreadful. This day's work fixed their doom as a nation: his blood is still on them, and on their children!

II. View the end with respect to Himself.

We know but little of the sufferings of Christ, and can form only a very faint conception; but two things may be observed concerning them—

1. His remarkable silence under false witnesses, ver. 63, when before Pilate, ch. xxvii. 12, 14, in the presence of Herod, Luke xxiii. 9, amidst the revilings of the chief priests, the indignities offered him by the people, and the railing of the dying thief. Hence was fulfilled that prophecy: 'He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.' Isai. liii. 7.

Oh what patience amidst cruel injustice—what an example to us!

2. The few words which he did speak were highly impressive. In his trial, though he was dumb before false accusers, yet when asked he never concealed the truth; and this too, when he knew the consequences, ver. 64. So also when before Pilate. Matt. xxvii. 11. John xviii. 33.

His last words at the time of his crucifixion were also highly interesting: he spoke several times very briefly, but with a fulness of meaning—

(1) When he was going to Calvary, and the women lamented him, he felt for Jerusalem more than for himself. Luke xxiii. 28—31.

(2) When they were nailing him to the cross, he cried, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

(3) When the penitent thief called upon him for mercy, his answer was, 'To day shalt thou be with me in paradise,' ver. 43.

(4) Though he was silent under man's injustice, yet he was fully sensible of the divine withdrawals: crying, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'

(5) He saw his afflicted mother standing near the cross, and bespoke the filial regard of the beloved disciple. John xix. 25—27.

(6) To express what he endured, and to fulfil the truth of prophecy, he said, 'I thirst.' Psl. xxii. 15. John xix. 28.

(7) Just before he expired, he declared, 'it is finished;' the great work which he came to accomplish, ver. 30.

(8) He committed himself to God, and yielded up his spirit. Luke xxiii. 46.

III. The end with respect to those for whom he died.

The end here was highly important. Peter saw this much better after our Lord's resurrection than before; and we do the same. We may know something of its importance by what is ascribed to it redemption through his blood, reconciliation, justification with God, and eternal life.

In short, on this alone depended all our salvation: by his death we have life, and by his stripes we are healed. Though he was dead, he is alive again, and lives for evermore. This is a source of hope and comfort to sinners to the end of the world: this is the life of the church on earth, and the joy of heaven itself. Rev. i. 18.

THE CUP OF WRATH.

It containeth much.—Ezekiel xxiii. 32.

Under the assumed character of two abandoned females, the prophet describes the apostasy of the sister kingdoms of Israel and Judah, ver. 4. The former having proved incorrigible and irreclaimable, God had delivered them into the hands of the Assyrians, ver. 9. Judah also having followed the example, and plunged into all the abominations of idolatry, he would now enter into judgment with these revolvers by suffering the Babylonians, who had been their confederates, to become their executioners, and to carry them away into captivity, and Jerusalem shall share the fate of Samaria, ver. 22, 23. “Thou shalt drink of thy sister’s cup, deep and large—it containeth much.”

I. Offer a few explanatory remarks.

1. The “cup” is sometimes the emblem of joy and gladness, Psal. xxiii. 5; but here of indignation and wrath, in allusion probably to a very ancient method of punishing criminals, by placing in their hands a poisoned cup, and compelling them to drink it. Thus our Lord’s sufferings are called a cup, which he tasted for every man. Matt. xxvi. 39. Heb. ii. 9

2. Afflictive dispensations are often represented by a cup, Psal. lxxiii. 10.; and though the Lord’s people are made to drink deep of it, yet the dregs only are reserved for the wicked. Psal. lxxv. 8. There is a mixture of mercy in all his judgments upon them that fear him, but to the impenitent and unbelieving it is wrath without mercy, and without end.

3. The cup is awfully significant of future and eternal misery, and hence is called ‘the cup of wrath.’ Rev. xvi. 19. The wrath of God and of the lamb is put into it; the cup has been filling for many years, and wrath treasuring up against the day of wrath; and it will not soon be emptied. It is also called ‘the cup of fury,’ as containing the inexpressible fierceness of divine indignation. Jer. xxv. 15. With respect to the culprit, it is ‘a cup of trembling.’ Isai. li. 17. It will make those tremble who drink of it, more than the poisoned cup, and ought to make us all tremble to think of it. Hab. iii. 16.

II. Notice the description given of the cup of wrath; “It containeth much.”

The cup is “deep and large,” containeth more than we can at present imagine, but not more than we shall be made to experience, if infinite grace and mercy prevent not.

1. It contains all the sins that we have ever committed: and these, if not now repented of, will fill us with ceaseless remorse in the world to come. They will be found treasured up, and mingled in the cup for this very purpose. Deut. xxxii. 34. Job had imagined this to be his

own case, but he was mistaken, for God had cast all his sins behind his back. ch. xiv. 17. But when the impenitent have filled up the measure of their iniquities, wrath will come upon them to the uttermost. Hos. xii. 13. If the death of Christ be not the death of sin in us, sin will be our everlasting ruin. Sins committed and forgotten will then come into remembrance, and in hell the sinner will have leisure to reflect on his folly and madness when on earth. Luke xvi. 25. Conscience keeps a faithful account of evil done; and though this account may be neglected now, it will be called over hereafter, and spread before us like Ezekiel's roll, which was written within and without: and who can stand before an accusing and condemning conscience? 1 John iii. 20.

2. As this cup contains all the sins we have ever committed, so also all the curses of that law which we have violated. Deut. xxviii. 15, 45. And who can tell what is comprehended in these awful denunciations, or know the power of his anger! Psal. xc. 11. The last word which the law speaks to us as sinners is misery and death, and it leaves us under the sentence till the day of execution. Gal. iii. 10. This curse it is that shall fill the sinner's cup, and shall come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones. Psal. cix. 18.

3. The everlasting vengeance of God is another ingredient in this portion of misery; and how large and deep must be that cup, which contains all the indignation and wrath that will be poured out upon the sinner to an endless eternity. As God's wrath will never be spent, so this cup can never be exhausted. The sinner's sufferings here are only temporary, but in the world to come they will be eternal, a destruction without end. 2 Thess. i. 9. A lost estate, lost liberty, or lost friends may be regained; but the loss of the soul is irreparable and intolerable. Matt. xvi. 26. Psalm xi. 6.

(1) If this cup 'containeth much,' let sinners beware how they add to its contents. Every sin committed, every mercy abused, will be a fearful aggravation. Rom. ii. 4.

(1) Who will be able to drink of it? Can thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee, saith the Lord. Ezek. xxii. 14. Isai. xxxiii. 14. When some drops only of this cup are tasted in the present life, they fill the soul with unutterable anguish. Psal. lxxxviii. 15, 16. Job xx. 24—29.

(3) Learn hence the evil of sin, which prepares and fills this bitter cup. Rom. vi. 23. Of every transgression it may be said, 'there is death in the pot.' Sin is the womb of all misery, the grave of all comfort.

(4) Let this cup of wrath remind us of the cup of sorrow which Jesus drank, and drank for us. The cup did not pass from him, that it might pass from us. Let this be our plea, under a sense of all our unworthiness. Matt. xxvi. 42.

EARLY PIETY.

In him there is found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam.—1 Kings xiv. 13.

Abijah was the son of that infamous king, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made all Israel to sin. He seems to have been his eldest son, and heir to the crown, as the nation felt much on account of his sickness and death. He is called a "child;" but as he so greatly interested the public attention, it is probable that he was growing up to maturity. When he fell sick, an expedient was devised in order to ascertain whether he would live or die; and the words before us are the prophet's answer.

There was something mysterious in the providence which removed this pious youth, who promised to be so great a blessing to the nation. But two ends seem to have been answered by this event. (1) It was in judgment to the family, and to the nation, who were utterly unworthy of him. (2) It was in mercy to him; he is taken from the evil to come. He shall have an honourable burial, though the rest of the family are given to the dogs, and the fowls of the air, ver. 11. He is taken to heaven, while they are left to fill up the measure of their iniquity.

In a peculiarly impressive form of speech, it is said of this young prince, that in him was found "some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel," which is only another mode of stating that he was the subject of genuine piety.

I. The description given us of the nature of true religion.

1. The expression in the text implies that true religion, however it may be despised by some, and abused by others, is notwithstanding "a good thing." The world in general say it is a bad thing, and that it makes persons melancholy: corrupt nature joins with this, and fears it would make our life miserable.

But surely it is good to be God's friend, rather than his enemy: to be man's friend, rather than be hateful and hating one another. It is good to be humble, rather than haughty; to be patient in spirit, rather than proud in spirit. Yet these are the effects which true religion tends to produce.

It is not only good in itself, but it is so in the esteem of all good men, and even in the consciences of the wicked. It is also good in its effects, having promise of the life that now is, and also of that which is to come; and shows us the only way in which we can find rest to our souls.

2. The description here given of the nature of true religion, implies that it is not a matter of mere outward formality, but that it is an inward living principle. The works of men are generally what they are in appearance only; but this is God's work, and it possesses an important reality. When man forms a character, he directs his chief attention to the exterior; but God begins at the heart: the for-

mer is of little account, if there be nothing good within. Of Abijah it is said, that the good which he possessed was found "in him;" in the temper and disposition of his mind, which diffused itself through all his actions.

3. It implies that the grand object towards which all the exercises of true religion tend, is God: it is something good "towards the Lord God of Israel." Here the following things may be noticed—

(1) Some persons appear to have nothing good in them, either towards God or man. As to God, he is not in all their thoughts: and as to man, they are neither good as parents nor as children, as masters nor as servants, nor in any of the relations of life; but are the bane and pest of human society.

(2) There are others who have something good in them towards men, but nothing good in them "towards God." They are kind parents, dutiful children, and useful members of society; but they have no love to religion, no concern for the glory of God.

(3) True religion tends *towards God* as its supreme end: its spirit is to long for God as our portion, and to love every other object for his sake. Where this principle is found, every thing will become subordinate to the divine glory; and though religion has its seat within, its fruits will appear outwardly in the life.

II. The circumstances which heightened and endeared the piety of young Abijah.

1. He was religious in early life, while he was yet a 'child.' True religion is lovely in all, but especially in the young: old age brings little more than the refuse of life to God, the torn and the lame for sacrifice. Youth is like the first ripe fruit, which his soul desireth.

2. He was descended from ungodly parents. Parental authority and example have great influence: yet in Abijah there was found some good thing, even "in the house of Jeroboam," as saints were found in Cæsar's household. Such an instance of mercy is peculiarly interesting; and in him was fulfilled the promise made to the sons of strangers. Isai. lvi. 3—5.

3. He was brought up amidst the flatteries and allurements of a court; an unfriendly soil, where every thing tended to cherish the worst passions of the human heart. Yet here a lily was found among thorns, and a pattern of exemplary piety in the house of a wicked and profligate prince.

4. He was surrounded with the snares of an idolatrous court, yet he loved and worshipped the true God, the God of Israel. It was like living in a furnace without being burnt. There is no state, however, but in it God may be loved and feared. Many plead that their temptations are so many and strong, but no character is truly known, except by means of temptations and trials.

III. Apply the subject to ourselves.

1. The sickness and death of this young prince may remind us what

our lot may soon be: youth is no security against death, for all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field.

2. Learn the importance of true religion, the religion of the heart, something good that God shall find in us. We must be born

again, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and in us dwelleth no good thing. How desirable to be found ready, to have oil in

our vessels with our lamps, when the Lord shall come.

3. Observe the favourable regard which God bears to the least degree of true religion: if it be there, it will be found, and he will own it. The least real good done for him will be an evidence of our love, even the giving of a cup of cold water for his sake; and he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Matt. xii. 20. xxv. 40.

THE FULNESS OF CHRIST.



And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.—

John i. 16.

The other evangelists give an account of Christ's human parentage, with the circumstances of his birth: but John gives a description of his glory as the Son of God, and of what he was before the world began. He is here spoken of as the Creator of all things, and as the light and life of men. His incarnation is next described, and with this is connected the passage before us. He dwelt amongst men, full of grace and truth; and of this fulness have we all received.

I. Illustrate and explain the subject.

Three things require to be noticed—what is meant by the fulness of Christ—in what way is this fulness communicated—and in what respect may we be said to receive grace for grace?

1. What is intended by the "fulness" of Christ. Not that which is essential to him as a Divine person, for that is incommunicable: but that which belongs to him as Mediator, and which is communicated to all them that believe. Col. i. 19.

The meaning is, that the Word being made flesh, all the riches of grace designed for man were deposited in him, were given to him, and through him to us: as when Joseph was made lord of Egypt, and all were directed to go to him for the supply of their wants. Gen. xlii. 55—57. John vi. 27.

(1) Christ was the covenant head of all his people, and it is out of regard to his worthiness that all his blessings are bestowed.

God made a covenant with Noah, and had respect to that in all he did for his posterity. Gen. vi. 18. Also with Abraham, Gen. xvii. 4: with David, Psal. lxxxix. 28. Thus in the counsels of divine

grace, God hath blessed us in Christ Jesus, Ephes. i. 3. 2 Tim. i. 9.

(2) All that is given to us freely, is to him a matter of just reward.

He had power to lay down his life, and to take it up again. John x. 18: power to quicken whom he will, John v. 25: power to forgive sin even on earth, Matt. ix. 6: power to give eternal life, John x. 28.

These things constitute the gospel, and which are denominated 'the unsearchable riches of Christ.' Thus it is, that through his poverty we are made rich. 2 Cor. viii. 9.

(3) Though the riches of Christ are unsearchable, yet we may form some idea of their fulness by the freeness of the invitations and promises. 'If any thirst, let him come unto me and drink; he that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out: he is able to save unto the uttermost all them that come unto God by him: able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.'

We may also judge of this fulness by what has actually been received from it. We all derive from him, but he derives nothing from us. All that his servants have ever possessed, of gifts or of grace, and all that they have done, is from him; and this, without his riches being either exhausted or diminished.

Had there ever been a time when the fulness of Christ should be exhausted, it was when through weakness he was dying on the cross. But lo! even then it overflowed: 'Father, forgive them—This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.'

2. In what way is this fullness communicated? By first receiving Christ: ver. 12.

The generality of mankind are like persons living near a fountain, but have nothing to draw with: they believe not in him, and so they receive nothing from him.

But there are some who receive him as he is revealed in the gospel, renouncing whatever stands in competition with him; and by receiving him, they receive every supply of grace from him.

It is also through his dwelling in our hearts by faith, that we continue to receive: and by counting all things but loss for his sake, we are made to possess all things in him. Ephes. iii. 19.

3. How is it that we may be said to "receive grace for grace?"

Some understand by it, a succession of blessings one after another, an abundance: others think it means grace received by us, corresponding with that which is in Christ, as a likeness is made to resemble the original. Christ was anointed, like Aaron the high priest; and as the sacred unction ran down to the skirts of his garments, so the anointing which was upon the Saviour was poured down upon all the members of his mystical body. We receive as it were the overflowings of that holy unction, and every portion of grace in our measure agreeing with the grace that is in him.

II. Improve the subject.

1. We learn from hence our condition as sinners: poor and needy, destitute of all good. All the self-sufficiency of sinners is only imaginary. The Laodiceans thought themselves rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing: but they were poor, and wretched, miserable, blind, and naked. He who thinks he knoweth any thing, knoweth nothing as he ought to know.

2. The way in which a poor lost sinner must be saved.

It is

Mark 9:24 "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me."

by receiving Christ, and deriving from his fulness: living upon his bounty, we are not only supplied, but made rich.

3. We see whence it was that those who have been the most eminent for grace have received all their supplies: by receiving Christ, and beholding his glory. This is our example, and our encouragement.

ZACHARIAS AND THE ANGEL.

Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this?—
Luke i. 18.

When Zacharias first beheld the angel, he was greatly troubled, ver. 12, as most of God's servants have been on the appearance of a celestial messenger. But as usual on such occasions, the angel endeavours to comfort him, ver. 13, as he afterwards did Mary, ver. 30, and the woman at the sepulchre, saying, 'Fear not.' Matt. xxviii. 5. Being strengthened by the kind condescension of the angel, Zacharias is now encouraged to ask a question, either for the confirmation of his faith, or as implying some degree of unbelief. "Whereby," says he, "shall I know this?"

I. The question may be considered as requiring what seemed to be necessary for the confirmation of his faith.

Zacharias undoubtedly believed the promises, and both himself and his wife Elizabeth were eminent for their piety, ver. 6. But as his faith needed to be strengthened, in reference to the special promise which was now announced, and which could not be accomplished without the interposition of a miracle, he asks for a sign. Gideon did the same, Judges vi. 36; and yet he is numbered amongst the faithful. Heb. xi. 32. True faith and weak faith may exist together. Mark ix. 24.

Two considerations may account for the want of faith in the present instance—

1. The magnitude of the blessing promised. The angel told him he should have a son; but the tidings appeared too good to be true. It was what he had often wished and prayed for, but had long given up the hope of such a favour. Jacob could easily believe the evil tidings concerning his beloved Joseph: but of the good he was not so credulous. Gen. xlv. 26. The Israelitish lord could admit the denunciations of the prophet, but not the promises of abundant mercy. 2 Kings vii. 2. The disciples could believe that they had taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, but could scarcely credit the fact of his resurrection. Luke xxiv. 41. So easy is it for sinful creatures to anticipate evil rather than good, and to stumble at the promises through unbelief.

2. The circumstances attending the annunciation to Zacharias, tended not a little to render him incredulous. He himself was an old man, and Elizabeth was barren: and shall she now become fruitful in her old age? Ver. 7. Thus when God promised to give his people flesh to eat in the wilderness, they could scarcely believe it possible, notwithstanding all the wonders he had wrought. Num. xi. 22, 23. How reasonable, yet how difficult for us to believe in a time of trouble, that God is able to do exceedingly beyond all that we can ask or think. Ephes. iii. 20. Abraham himself was an illustrious exception. Rom. iv. 18.

II. The question may be viewed in a less favourable light, and as liable to some objections.

1. There was a want of courtesy in the manner in which Zacharias addressed the angel. It was a little too abrupt, and too much resembled the answer of the proud men of Israel to the prophet. Jer. xliii. 2. Zacharias seems to have forgotten the dignity of the messenger, who accordingly informed him of the high station he occupied before the throne of the Eternal, ver. 19. When this same angel appeared to Daniel, he fell prostrate, and was unable to speak to him. Dan. viii. 17.

2. The question implied a degree of unbelief, as if it were doubtful whether the Lord would indeed perform his promise. He had given Abraham a son, and also to Hannah, under similar circumstances: why then should it be incredible, that he should fulfil his word in the present instance. Yet Zacharias, like unbelieving Thomas and Gideon, cannot admit the fact without a sign. John xx. 25. Judges vi. 17.

3. The inadvertence and unbelief of Zacharias met with a severe reproof, ver. 20. He wanted a sign, and a sign was given him, but it was such a one as convinced him that he had spoken amiss.

(1) Learn from hence, that imperfection marks the best of human characters: there is none righteous, none perfect, no not one. Job ix. 20. Rom. iii. 10. 1 John i. 8.

(2) The easily besetting sin in all good men is that of unbelief; and in the case of Zacharias, neither visions nor revelations were a sufficient preservative against it. Heb. iii. 12.

(3) Let the recollection of our own unbelief, in innumerable instances, humble us in the sight of God. How often have we questioned his love and faithfulness, notwithstanding the pledges he has afforded us in the gift of his Son, and in the grace of his Holy Spirit.

(4) How wonderful is the compassion and condescension of God, in passing over and forgiving all our unworthiness and unbelief. He fulfilled his word to Sarah, though she had derided the promise; to Gideon, notwithstanding his unbelief; and to Zacharias, though he had questioned the message of the angel. Gen. xviii. 13. Judges vi. 12. Rom. iii. 3. 2 Tim. ii. 13.

(5) Let us learn to walk by faith, relying upon the promises, though we see not at present their accomplishment, and though clouds and darkness are around about us. John xx. 29. 1 Pet. i. 8. Heb. xi. 13.

TRUE RELIGION THE SOURCE OF JUSTICE AND BENEVOLENCE.

This do and live : for I fear God.—Genesis xlii. 18.

The history of Joseph never fails to be interesting, as often as we read it. Here we have an account of his brethren, coming the first time into Egypt to buy corn. On this occasion he spoke roughly to them, and put them in prison, but afterward released them. His conduct towards them may be seen in verse 14 to 17.

(1) Observe, his design in saying to them, “I fear God,” when he committed them to prison, was to convince them that he did not do it wantonly or in cruelty; but that his conduct in this instance was regulated by the purest motives, and that they had no reason to expect any injustice at his hands.

(2) What an effect it must have had on them, to find that there was a man in Egypt who feared the God of their fathers; a man too in a high and honourable station, and who was lord over all the land.

They themselves had lived in a religious family, and did not fear him.

(3) Notice the connexion there is between fearing God, and dealing justly and mercifully with men. This has been verified in all ages; true religion is the parent of humanity, and of genuine benevolence.

I. Inquire what is included in the fear of God.

This term is descriptive of the whole of true religion, which is thus frequently expressed in various parts of the Old Testament. If Joseph had lived in gospel times, he would probably have said, ‘I believe in Christ;’ and the meaning is much the same.

Religion however does not consist in slavish fear or dread of the Almighty; in trying to please him as a hard master, or in praying to avert his vengeance. These are the feelings of an idle unprofitable servant, and not of a true believer.

But true religion is called the fear of God, because

1. It chiefly consists in a sacred and solemn dread of the Supreme Being; a deep and reverential regard for his holy name, his worship, and authority. Its tendency is to fill the mind with mingled sentiments of love and awe: where this is wanting, there is no genuine religion.

2. True piety produces tenderness of conscience, as one of its principal fruits and evidences a fear to neglect what God requires, or to trifle with his commands, as well as the dread of doing what he has forbidden. It is therefore with infinite propriety that all true religion is called the fear of the Lord.

3. Though under the gospel, fear is not the predominant spirit of believers, but love and joy; yet even there it is necessary, and neither love nor joy, nor any other part of true religion can exist without it.

We are exhorted to perfect holiness ‘in the fear of God,’ and

this must accompany our highest joys. This is the great preservative, both against presumption and despair. Heb. xii. 28.

II. Consider its influence on our conduct towards men: "This do, and live; for I fear God."

It is a fact well known in former times, that where the fear of God was not, there was no security for justice and mercy towards men. Hence the conduct of Abraham, when he came to Abimelech at Gerar. Gen. xx. 11.

This also is true of magistrates, and public rulers in general. Hence the conduct of the unjust judge, mentioned by our Lord. Luke xviii. 4. Even David, when he had lost his tenderness of conscience towards God, became cruel to Uriah, and also to the Amorites. 2 Sam. xii. 31.

On the contrary, where the fear of God prevails, there we shall find justice and humanity towards men: the kings of Israel were on this account esteemed to be merciful men. 1 Kings xx. 31.

As masters, it will make us kind; as parents, tender; as friends, faithful; as members of society, peaceable and well disposed.

And how is this to be accounted for?

1. True religion, or the fear of God, impresses the mind with a sense of its accountableness. Without this, a man considers only himself: with it, a king will feel that he has a King above him; and a master, that he also has a Master in heaven. Under this conviction, those who have little to fear from others, will fear God; and their conduct in the highest stations will be regulated by it. Neh. v. 15. The principle that makes us feel that we are stewards, and must shortly give an account, is above all others adapted to inspire us with the love of justice and benevolence.

2. The fear of God will render us sensible of our own faults and failings, and of our need of mercy. Such will be quickly aware that they owe ten thousand talents, and cannot therefore think of taking a fellow servant by the throat, and saying, Pay me what thou owest. Genuine religion will impart to us a spirit of meekness and kindness, and make us ready to forgive. Thus also it wrought in Joseph.

3. The fear of God is mixed with holy love: such therefore who possess this principle, will feel benevolently towards all that bear the divine image whether as creatures, who are formed after his natural likeness, or as those who bear a resemblance to his moral nature.

(1) We may from hence learn in what way we may hope to see the general state and condition of the world ameliorated: teach men truly to fear God, and all the rest will follow of course.

(2) We are here furnished with a rule for self-examination: the criterion of all genuine piety is the fear of God, disposing us to the exercise of justice and mercy towards men.

(3) Whether we fear God or not, we are in his hands: by him we must be judged, and he will reward every man according to his works.

CERTAIN EFFICACY OF THE ATONEMENT.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.—
Isaiah liii. 11.

We need not ask the question which the Eunuch did, ‘Of whom spake the prophet this; of himself, or of some other man?’ The whole chapter is a prophetic history of the Saviour: it speaks of his sufferings, and of the glory that should follow. No prophecy can be more clear; it leaves the unbelieving Jews and modern deists wholly without excuse.

1. Explain the import of the text.

The term “travail” alludes no doubt to the pains of child-bearing; and the “satisfaction” denotes the joy that should follow it.

More particularly—

1. The term “travail” is commonly expressive of some great affliction, and some important good arising out of it. Each of these ideas will apply to various sufferings which have had a desirable issue.

The troubles of Israel in the wilderness are thus described, Num. xx. 14; and those also attending their captivity in Babylon. Mic. iv. 10.

The painful experience by which true wisdom is obtained, is expressed in similar language Eccles. i. 13; and the pains of creation under the curse, Rom. viii. 32.

In the passage before us, the sufferings of Christ, or rather his obedience unto death, are intended by the same term—“the travail of his soul:” from whence arises the salvation of the world.

2. The term “satisfied,” as we have already hinted, alludes to that joy which follows upon child-birth: ‘a woman has sorrow when her hour is come, but when delivered, she remembers the anguish no more.’

It is truly wonderful that Christ should make so much of our salvation, that it should ‘satisfy’ him for all his pains and sufferings: yet so it is—

(1) Observe, his heart was so set on this as often to overlook his sufferings in the prospect of it. He seemed no more to remember the anguish, for joy that he had accomplished the salvation of his people.

Hence when he was risen from the dead, little was heard of his sufferings; but his first words were, ‘Go and tell my brethren that I ascend—Ought not Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory—Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’

(2) When he appeared to John in vision, and mentioned his death, no regard was had to his sufferings, but rather to what followed. ‘I am he that was dead, and am alive again.’ Rev. i. 18.

II. Consider the fitness of the salvation of sinners being ascribed to the travail of his soul.

The one was the effect of the other, as much so as birth is the effect of labour: because—

1. It was this sore travail on the part of Christ by which he became an expiatory sacrifice, rendering the exercise of mercy towards sinners consistent with the claims of justice. God was not wanting in love towards us, any more than David was towards Absalom; but he could not express it without dishonour.

While merciful to sinners, he must of necessity condemn sin: hence 'his soul is made an offering for sin, and it pleased the Lord to bruise him.'

He was wounded for our transgressions, and the chastisement of our peace was upon him, that by his stripes we might be healed.

Now God can be just, and the justifier of him that believeth: mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have embraced each other.

2. The travail of his soul is the direct procuring cause of our salvation, or that of which our salvation is the just reward.

Hence he is said to have 'obtained' eternal redemption for us, and to be the 'author' of eternal salvation. God delighted to bestow life on us, in reward of his obedience and death.

If man had been obedient, he would have been rewarded, as a kind father bestows favours on his obedient children: but man becoming a rebel, there is none to reward. Here then is the necessity of a Substitute, or one for whose sake God might bestow favour on us. Thus he dealt with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, and with Christ. Isai. xlix. 6.

3. The sufferings of Christ in obtaining salvation for us, is a cause adequate to the effect. All the doings and sufferings of men would be insufficient: proud man would fain merit heaven for himself by various toils, but they are no better than splendid sins: and if ever so good, they are no more than what duty requires.

But Christ did that to which he was not originally obliged: he voluntarily 'took on him the form of a servant, and become obedient unto death.' Phil. ii. 7, 8.

Hence all he did was of such importance, that the salvation of Israel would have been but a small recompense; and God therefore would give him the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. Isai. xlix. 6. Psal. ii. 8.

III. The ground we have to labour and hope and pray for the success and increase of his kingdom.

This success is directly promised in the verse following our text, and we have abundant reason to hope and to pray for its accomplishment—

1. The love of Christ and of souls will lead us to desire it. If this will crown him, let him be crowned: if this will 'satisfy' him, let him be abundantly satisfied!

2. The encouraging truth here exhibited must induce us to expect it. The heart of Christ is set upon it: the Father's word is pledged for it, and his heart also is in it. "He shall see of the travail of his soul."

Here then is ground for the prayer of faith, which is the only successful prayer.

3. There is reason to believe that the greater part of this promise is

yet to be fulfilled, and that at no great distance of time. Many prophecies, much stronger than any thing we have yet seen, remain to be fulfilled. 'The whole earth is to be filled with his glory : the little leaven shall leaven the whole lump : the saints are to possess the kingdom.' Many of the prophecies are fulfilled, but not these ; and the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it. Isai. ix. 7.

(1) Let us inquire what interest we feel in this great event ; and what labours we engage in to promote it.

(2) If we are negligent and careless about it, yet Christ shall not lose his reward. Whether we love him or not, he shall be loved.

(1) What encouragement we have to seek 'salvation in his name : it is that which 'satisfies' him for all that he endured.

CHRIST HEALING THE MULTITUDE.

♥ *And the whole multitude sought to touch him ; for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all.*—Luke vi. 19.

Many of the people, it is probable, were anxious only for a bodily cure, while others sought and obtained spiritual healing : but all who touched the Redeemer believingly were made whole. Both the facts mentioned in the text are interesting—

I. The whole multitude sought to touch him.

They did not apply to him personally, as the leper did, and blind Bartimeus, and many others. Nor were they brought to him like the man sick of the palsy, who was let down through the roof of the house. Neither did Jesus visit them, as he did the Centurion's daughter ; or the mother of Peter's wife. But contrary to many former examples, "the whole multitude sought to touch him." This implies—

1. Deep humility.—They did not presume to present themselves before him, or immediately to address him. He was pure and spotless ; they were polluted and defiled : a sense of their unworthiness kept them at a distance. Thus the woman who touched the hem of his garment, stood behind him, Matt. ix. 20 ; and she also who washed his feet with tears, Luke vii. 38. Those who come to Christ must come deeply sensible of their unworthiness, and of their need of him. Matt. viii. 8. Luke xv. 21.

2. Strong faith.—They were persuaded, not only that Christ's touching them, but their touching him, would effect a cure. They must consider him as an almighty and a willing Saviour, or they would not have ventured on such an experiment. Matt. ix. 22. All things are possible to him that believeth ; and as faith gives honour to Christ, so he will put an honour upon faith. Mark ix. 23.

3. Courage and perseverance.—They “sought” to touch him, and this required some effort, not because Christ himself was difficult of access, but because the crowd rendered him almost inaccessible. When Zaccheus wished to see Jesus, he could not come near, because of the press, and was compelled to ascend a sycamore tree. But those who truly love and seek the Saviour will not suffer their desires to be disappointed, and difficulties will only stimulate their exertions. Mark x. 43.

II. The effect produced by their touching him; “there went virtue out of him, and healed them all.”

1. The cure was silently performed. Jesus said nothing, and did nothing; but ‘there went virtue out of him’ in great abundance, like rays of light from the sun, or water from the fountain. Such is his overflowing fulness, and such the riches of his grace, that mercy comes without asking, and without any effort to impart it. It is only for the Son of God to dwell amongst us, and the world is filled with his fragrance. John i. 14. 2 Cor .ii. 14.

2. The cure was secret and instantaneous. None appear to have been aware of it but he who imparted the benefit, and the individuals who received it. Mark v. 30, 33. Luke xvii. 14. The kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation, but descends imperceptibly like the dew. Other physicians require a long course of medicine in order to effect a cure, but here all is done in an instant, without the use of any visible means. Matt. viii. 3. xx. 34.

3. It was universal, including ‘the whole multitude,’ and the various diseases with which they were afflicted, ver. 17—19. Diseases both of body and mind, recent or inveterate, are instantly healed with a touch, and the heavenly virtue diffuses its sanative influence throughout the whole of the living mass. On other occasions, Christ condescended to individual instances of human suffering and infirmity; here every thing is done on a large scale, to show that he was Immanuel, God with us.

4. Still, in this, as in every other case, miraculous healing was confined to those who believed, and sought a cure. The Lord could have healed the multitude, without the intervention of believing; but this was made an indispensable prerequisite; and faith in him is the turning point of salvation. Matt. xiii. 58. xvii. 19, 20. John iii. 36.

(1) We derive from hence the fullest assurance of Christ’s ability to save. After such a miracle, what is it that his power and grace cannot effect? Oh sinner, he can cure thy ignorance, pride, and unbelief, and save thee to the very uttermost. Heb. vii. 25. His healing virtue is still undiminished, and it flows as freely as in the days of his flesh.

(2) As all that is necessary for our healing is, that we be sensible of our spiritual malady, and apply to Christ alone for a cure: all others are physicians of no value. Matt. ix. 12.

(3) As in the present instance, so also in our spiritual healing, the party who is the subject of it is alone conscious of the fact. The effects become visible in time, but the change itself is produced by an invisible agency, renewing and sanctifying all the powers of the soul. John iii. 8.

INVITATION TO ENLARGED PRAYER.

Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.—Psalm lxxxi. 10.

It was a heathen practice to worship the sun and the moon; the former at the time of its rising, and the latter at the time of its change. Hence some have thought, that God appointed the time of the new moon for the worship of his courts, in order to counteract the species of idolatry.

This psalm seems to have been composed for the feast of the new moon, and perhaps for the first new moon in the year. This expostulation in ver. 8, 9, is very tender: the consideration by which it is enforced is what God had done, and what he would still do for his people. If he were insufficient, they might seek after a “strange god:” otherwise they were without excuse.

The “opening of the mouth,” may either allude to children who cry for food, or to one who asks a favour; and it teaches us that God is able to fulfil our most enlarged desires.

I. Explain the exhortation.

“Open thy mouth wide,” that is, ask much, and God will give it: expect much from him, and you shall not be disappointed.

1. Be not content with temporal blessings, but ask for those which are spiritual and eternal. It is not unlawful to desire the good things of life, but they are not chiefly to be desired. Any one spiritual blessing is of far greater magnitude than the whole world; and if we would enjoy these, we must open our mouth wide. To ask for these is to desire God for our portion: it is to ask for an interest in his heart, and not merely to the bounty of his hand, but for that which shall endure for ever. For example, do not be content with a reprieve from punishment, but ask for pardon. Do not ask for what is not promised, for that you may never have; but for what is promised, that you may have abundantly. Do not ask for such a kind of righteousness, and for so much religion as may pass before men; but for that in which you may stand before God. Do not so much desire to be delivered out of trouble, as to get good by it.

2. Be not satisfied with a small degree of religion, but aspire after and pray for much; much of the power and much of the comfort of it. He that desires so much religion as may carry him to heaven, will never come there at all. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him; in them that hope in his mercy. Pray not only for that faith which is saving, but for that which is strong, giving glory to God. Not only for that love which is sincere, but for that which abounds in all knowledge, and in all judgment. Phil. i. 9. Desire to have not only peace with God, but holy freedom and intimate communion with him. 1 John i. 3.

3. Let us pray not only for those things which concern our own

souls, but also for the good of the souls of others; for the good of the cause of Christ, and his kingdom at large.

Keep not silence, and give him no rest, until he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Isai. lxii. 6, 7. Ask to be blessed in the blessedness of God's chosen, and to see the good of his nation. Seek the salvation of others, and you will find your own. Psal. cvi. 4, 5.

4. Ask all in faith. Faith in the divine promises is of great importance in enlarged prayer. Much of our coldness arises from unbelief: if we believe, we shall receive. John xv. 7.

II. Enforce the exhortation.

Consider what need there is for enlarged prayer, and why we should open our mouths wide in seeking God—

1. Our wants are very great and pressing. We are immortal, guilty, dying creatures. Think of what we are capable of suffering and enjoying. An eternity of bliss or woe is before us: we are candidates for the one, and if we miss it, we fall into the other. How important and interesting is our situation: we are walking as it were on a narrow bridge, with an unfathomable gulf on either side. Crowns of glory are before us, and the pit of perdition is beneath us.

2. Great as our wants are, they are not too great for God to supply.

His heart is large and he will give us according to his riches in glory. Phil. iv. 19. Open thy mouth wide, and he will fill it.

We may judge of the liberality of another, partly by his words, if he be faithful, and partly by his actions: and in this way we may know something of the divine beneficence.

His promises are a faithful index to his heart, and these are exceedingly great and precious. 'I will be their God: their sins and iniquities will I remember no more: I will never leave them nor forsake them.' Psal. xlviii. 14. Isai. xli. 10. We may also know what God will do for them that ask, by what he has done already. Consider what he did of old for the Patriarchs, and for Israel: how he pardoned, blessed, and saved them.

But more still since then, in the gift of his Son: and how shall he not with him also freely give us all things. Rom. viii, 32.

3. The redemption of Christ Jesus is also large. By it provision is made for all our wants, and a medium for the conveyance of every blessing. On this ground it was that our Lord encouraged his disciples to ask largely in his name. John xvi. 23, 24. The love of God to sinners wanted a medium by which to express itself, like the soul of David towards Absalom; and the sufferings of Christ as our substitute sufficiently proved, that God was the enemy of sin, while he was the sinner's friend. Rom. iii. 26.

Divine love also wanted something worthy of being rewarded. God would have given us eternal life, but there was nothing to justify its bestowment. Man by sin became utterly unworthy: but in Jesus he is well pleased: let us therefore come boldly in his name. Ephes. iii. 12. Heb. iv. 16. If we receive and enjoy but little, it is because we ask but little, and do not ask in faith. James iv. 2, 3. 1 John v. 14.

— ENMITY AGAINST GOD.

Let us not fight against God.—Acts xxiii. 9.

While Paul was making his energetic defence before the Jewish sanhedrim, he was smitten on the mouth by order of the high priest, as Micaiah was in the presence of Zedekiah. Not at all discouraged by such injurious treatment, the apostle denounces a judgment against his persecutor, and with admirable adroitness avails himself of a difference in the sanhedrim on the doctrine of the resurrection. The pharisees, who believed in this fundamental truth, were for acquitting the intrepid advocate, presuming he might have had some supernatural revelation; and then the opposition, they alleged, would be “fighting against God.”

As the present is only one of the instances in which this enmity is made manifest, we shall

I. Show in what way men may be said to fight against God.

1. When they hate and abuse his people. The blessed Jesus himself was ‘despised and rejected of men,’ and this will more or less be the portion of all his faithful followers. Wicked men commonly cast that contempt on goodness which is due only to their own wickedness, and persecute those whom they have not the virtue to imitate. This enmity began to appear soon after the fall of man; and as Luther used to say, Cain will continue to kill Abel to the end of the world. 1 John iii. 12. Gal. iv. 29. 2 Tim. iii. 12.

2. Men may be said to fight against God, when they restrain and silence his ministers.—They that touch his prophets, touch the apple of his eye, and he will not forget to resent the injury. Zech. ii. 8, 9. Jerusalem did this, and was afterwards destroyed. Luke xiii. 34, 35. And what was it but fighting against God, when nearly two thousand eminent ministers were silenced by the Act of Uniformity, and their light put under a bushel! Every attempt to hinder the spread of the gospel, comes under the charge of slaying God’s witnesses.

3. This opposition displays itself in enmity against the truth, where no violence is offered to its advocates.—The contention between God and sinners is, whether his will or theirs shall be done, whether his laws or their lusts shall prevail. When Jeremiah came with a message from the Lord to the people of Israel, they insolently said, Nay, but we will do whatsoever goeth out of our own mouth. Jer. xlv. 16, 17. This sort of enmity is still indulged, if not expressed: and it is the character of all unbelievers that they are disobedient, and to every good work reprobate. Rom. viii. 7. 1 Pet. ii. 8. Titus i. 16.

4. Dissatisfaction with and resisting the providence of God, is another part of this hostility.—This is called a ‘contending’ with the Almighty, a ‘reproving’ of him, and a ‘replying’ against God. Job xl. 2. Isai. xlv. 9. Rom. ix. 20. In times of affliction and distress, how common is it to indulge discontent, and to think we do well to be angry, if not di-

rectly to impeach the divine government; yet what is this but treason and rebellion against the Lord the King. Isai. viii. 21. When God strikes the miserable sinner, he is ready to return the blow: but it is easy to see what will be the end of such a contest. Isai. xlv. 9.

5. Men fight against God in resisting conviction, and offering violence to their own consciences.—The antediluvians did this, under the preaching of Noah, Gen. vi. 3: and the unbelieving Jews, under the ministry of the apostles, Acts vii. 51. Unconverted men are in the habit of stifling their convictions, or of treating them as unwelcome visitors, and are in danger of being given up to final impenitence and unbelief. Acts xxiv. 25. Matt. xiii. 14, 15.

II. Consider the guilt and danger of such conduct.

Enmity against God can proceed from nothing but ignorance and pride; ignorance of God, and a proud conceit of our own wisdom; and this will lead to utter ruin and despair. Jer. v. 3, 4. 'Let us then not fight against God.'

The contest is vain and futile. Consider the power of your adversary, and the impossibility of maintaining such a warfare. 1 Cor. x. 22. Isai. xl. 21. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks, said Jesus to the persecutor; and every sinner will find it so. Acts ix. 5. Luke xiv. 31.

3. The issue will be fatal. In other contests the event may be doubtful; here it is certain, and it will be sure to go against you. Job ix. 4. Heb. x. 31.

4. Let us rather be reconciled, and 'not fight against God.' The way is now open, a Mediator is provided, peace is made by the blood of his cross, and the awful breach may be effectually healed. 2 Cor. v. 19, 20. Matt. v. 25. Isai. xxvii. 5.

5. If not reconciled in this world, the contest will have no end, for God will be an everlasting adversary. Here only, at the foot of the cross, can God and sinners meet. In the world to come he will be far off, inaccessible, and for ever implacable. Isai. lv. 6. Luke xvi. 23, 26. Psal. i. 21, 22.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE A PILGRIMAGE.

I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.
Psalms xxxix. 12.

This is a very plaintive psalm, written at the time of some heavy affliction, and while on the borders of the grave. Then it is we feel the full force of such sentiments as are expressed in ver. 4—6. It is then also we feel the importance of having God for our hope and portion, ver. 7; and of having all our sins forgiven, ver. 8. Then also we feel removed from the world, and consider ourselves as strangers in it.

I. Observe, it is the character of a good man, that he is not at home in this world : "I am a stranger and a sojourner."

He is like a person who lives for a time in a country that is not his own : he is more than a visitor, and less than a settled native.

Thus Abraham was a stranger even in the land of promise : such was Jacob with Laban, Israel in Egypt, and Elimelech in the land of Moab.

There are several characteristics which belong to us as sojourners—

1. Our hearts must not be set on present enjoyments. Egypt was perhaps as rich as Canaan, yet Moses was not at home there : he was to see the goodly mountain and Lebanon, but not to possess it.

A life full of thought and care, and worldly anxiety, is not that of a sojourner ; the man whose heart is set on wealth or any created good, is not a Christian.

2. We must not be overwhelmed with the injuries and sorrows of life. In a world where we are strangers, we are not to expect every thing to our wishes, but must look for some untoward circumstances. If any person is brought into despair by any worldly loss, it shows where his heart is, and what his portion is.

As to injuries from men, a stranger scarcely expects to meet with justice. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own : we must therefore be content to put up with many things unpleasant.

Israel was frequently annoyed in the way to Canaan, and we must expect to meet with various inconveniences : but what traveller would fret himself on that account. He is only at an inn, and shall quickly leave it.

3. Neither must we entangle ourselves with worldly disputes and controversies. The inhabitants of Sodom made it an objection to

Lot, though unjustly, that he was only a sojourner with them, and therefore should not interfere with their concerns. Nor is it worth while for a Christian to embroil himself with party politics, or mere worldly concerns, which he is soon to leave : it is his business to bear good-will to all, and to be the partisan of none.

A wise man would do as a missionary would in a foreign land ; and every real Christian is a missionary.

4. If we be sojourners, our intimacies must not be formed with worldly men, who have their portion in this life, but with those who are travelling in the way to heaven.

It is proper that we should be kind and courteous towards all, as Abraham was to the children of Heth ; but to choose for our companions such only as fear God, and keep his precepts.

Those are the best connexions which shall never be dissolved ; and it is painful to think of choosing such to dwell with here, from whom we must be parted at death to meet no more.

5. The whole of the Christian life must be a hidden one.

Our conversation must be in heaven ; our joys, our sorrows, our pleasures, and pursuits must all be such as are proper to those who seek a better country. Heb. xi. 15, 16.

II. Though a good man is a stranger and a sojourner upon earth, yet he is not without a friend : "I am a stranger with thee."

Every good man is on the Lord's side; he cares for his cause in an apostate world, like Lot in Sodom. He has also communion with God, and walks in holy fellowship with him. When Israel had wandered in the wilderness for forty years, without any certain dwelling place, and were now about to possess one, but lost it through unbelief, they were thankful to find a dwelling place in God. Psal. xc. 1.

He is that to his people which a home is to the weary traveller: he is better to us than an inheritance, or than any abiding city, and he it is that walks with us through this great and terrible wilderness. Lev. xxvi. 11, 12. Deut. viii. 15. 2 Cor. vi. 16.

III. Though a stranger and a sojourner, yet he has a home to which he shall go when this life is over.

This is implied in the terms of the text: for they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a better country. If we had no other in view, we should be in danger of making a home in that where we now are: but if we have another in prospect, our hopes, our desires will be there.

David himself did not look for this because he had no other; for he had Canaan for a possession, and was king over Israel; yet he considered himself as a stranger and a sojourner upon earth.

Heaven will finally be our home, and we shall be put in possession of it by and by; then the whole family will be gathered together.

Heaven will also be the sweeter to us at last, after our sojourning in the wilderness, as Canaan was to Israel.

GLORYING IN THE CROSS.

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.—Galatians vi. 14.

It is a mark of false religion, that it leads men to glory in something else, and not in the Lord. The Jews valued themselves on circumcision, and their being the children of Abraham. The false teachers in the churches of Galatia displayed a great deal of vain-glorying, desirous of making a fair show in the flesh: ver. 12. They wished to ingratiate themselves with the Galatians, and to supplant the apostles. But Paul wholly disclaimed every thing of this kind, and declares his great object to be to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ. The language he employs is very strong, and expressive of the holy ardour of his mind, as will appear in the following particulars—

(1) He considers the cross of Christ *as an object of glorying*. Had he consulted the opinion of the world, he would have found that it was

the great shame of christianity. 'Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness.' It was Satan's design, in effecting the crucifixion of our Lord, to overwhelm his cause with contempt. It might therefore have seemed enough for Paul to say, God forbid that I should ever be ashamed of my Lord, though he was crucified: but instead of this, he accounts it an object of exultation.

(2) It is with him *the only object* of glorying. Many would have thought that Paul might have gloried in some other things: his descent from the tribe of Benjamin, his zeal, his literary acquirements, his office, labours, success and reputation as an apostle. He was formed to take a leading part in whatever he undertook. When an enemy to the gospel, he breathed out his whole soul in threatenings and slaughter against the church of God. When he became a friend, he was equally ardent in its defence. Yet in none of these things would he glory, but in the cross of Christ.

(3) He bears the most emphatic protest *against glorying in any thing else*: "God forbid!" Far be it from me to think of any other object. This mode of speaking is not used lightly. It is of the nature of a solemn oath, and applied to things which he held in the greatest abhorrence: so that those things with which others were elated, and in which they gloried, he most solemnly abjured. It would have shocked him to have valued himself on such grounds, or to have had his heart divided between Christ and the world. His language is, "Be **HE** my ambition, my joy, my hope, my life, my all!"

Oh what christians should we be, if our eye were thus single: if the things which make a fair show in the flesh, were regarded by us as they were by Paul. "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." I am as a dead man, and the world is dead to me: it has lost all its charms in my view, and it ceases to have any influence over me.

I. Enquire wherein this crucifixion to the world consists, and what are the characters in which this spirit is exemplified.

1. Certainly not in those who are *eaten up of the love of the world*, and whose sole concern it is to encrease their wealth. Yet there are men of this description, and that under a profession of the gospel. Some make haste to be rich, regardless of the means: others who are poor, may be of the same disposition, fretting and murmuring against God, and thinking hard of their lot.

The man who is dead to the world is one who is content with his portion: more concerned to devote what he has to the glory of God, than to increase it. It is not him who can find no time for God and religion: but he who in all his ways acknowledges him, and sets the Lord always before him. It is not him who retires from the world, like a monk or a hermit; but he, who while in the world, devotes his all to God, and walks as in his sight.

Let but all our concerns and undertakings in life be subordinate to the interests of religion, and they will rather aid than hinder our chris-

tian course. Such a one may say with Paul, "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

2. This spirit is certainly not found in men whose grand object it is to *secure the approbation of the world*, and to gain popular applause. The opinion of the world is to some men the oracle in which they trust: under its smiles they live, and under its frowns they die. Hence their principal concern is to secure the approbation of men by temporising principles, and by every means of servile conformity.

But not so Paul: with him it was a light matter to be judged of man's judgment, or to enjoy the smiles of the rich and the great.

The man who is crucified to the world, is he whose chief concern it is to be approved of God: he who can bear adversity without being unduly depressed, and prosperity without being elated by it.

3. It is not found in those who *mix something worldly with their religion*, in order to make it palatable, that the offence of the cross may cease. This has been a principal source of corruption, in doctrine and in worship: great pains have been taken by false teachers and false professors, to render the doctrine of the cross more grateful to the carnal heart. The judaising teachers did this, and may have done it since.

To be as Paul, is to lay aside all carnal reasoning and worldly policy, and as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word: to keep the ordinances as they were at first delivered, and to maintain the purity of gospel worship and discipline.

II. The medium through which this deadness to the world is accomplished: "by the cross of Christ."

We may indeed be dead to the world, through the failure of mere natural powers, the infirmities of age, or the progress of disease; or from chagrin and disappointment, we may take delight in nothing.

But this is not the spirit inculcated by the example of Paul. The crucifixion of which he speaks is like that of a lesser light obscured by a greater: a little joy swallowed up of that which is unspeakable and full of glory.

1. Our *first believing in Christ Crucified* produces this effect.

The love of former sins is relinquished: the things that have charmed us, charm us now no more: the company we once sought is no more desired: the riches, the honours, the pleasures of the world are no longer what they used to be: we say of all these things, get ye hence!

A new set of objects is now set before us, a new set of feelings is now excited: we have better riches, more abiding honours, more enduring substance, more refined pleasures and delights.

2. The more deeply we enter into *the doctrine of the cross*, the more dead shall we be to every thing but Christ.

Paul at the latest period of life 'counted all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,' and that he might still go on to 'know him.'

The wonders of the cross have fixed the admiration of angels, and produced in them a comparative indifference to every other object. Ephes. iii. 10. 1 Peter i. 12.

Be this my study on earth: my theme in heaven!

ON HEARING THE WORD.

Take heed therefore how ye hear.—Luke viii. 18.

Preaching the word and hearing it, are important parts of christian worship. The former being a divine institution, renders the other a serious duty: hence our Lord has said much upon the subject. In the parable of the Sower, he describes four kinds of ground, designed to illustrate the different effects of the word on those who hear it. It also teaches this solemn and affecting truth, that out of four kinds of ground, or classes of hearers, there was but one that bare fruit.

Two different uses are made of this parable by our Lord: one is addressed to preachers of the word, in ver. 16, 17; and the other to hearers, in the words of our text.

The evangelist Mark, ch. iv. 24, mentions another case to which this parable was applied; and it certainly becomes us to take heed of this. The doctrine we sit under will necessarily have some influence upon us. If it be false, it will stupify and mislead us: it will nourish our pride and self-righteousness, and fill us with a vain and delusive hope of salvation.

In the words before us we are cautioned ‘how’ we hear, as well as ‘what’ we hear. This is a matter of the utmost importance, as it appears by the foregoing parable, that the same doctrine has different effects, according to the different state of mind in those who hear it. It is either a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.

I. Enquire in what manner it is necessary to hear the word so as to profit by it.

Paul had to entreat some that they receive not the grace of God in vain; and there is need for this, for many hear and receive the gospel altogether in vain.

1. If we would profit by the word, it is necessary to hear it with *deep attention* and seriousness. There is an idle dissipated manner in which some come and go from the house of God: they never pray before they come, nor attend with a devotional spirit when there. They rush into the divine presence, like the horse into the battle, nor reflect when they go away: but this is offering the sacrifice of fools. Eccles. v. 1.

These are the “way-side” hearers, who come and go like mere triflers: thus a whole life is spent by some hearers, without any improvement or any seriousness. They never understand, never feel, never pray: no ‘earnest heed’ is given to the word, and therefore they ‘let it slip’ through the mind. Heb. ii. 1.

2. If we would profit by the word, *the mind must not be pre-occupied* with other things, and things that are opposite to it. Many come to God’s house with their thoughts full of worldly concerns, either fretting at disappointments, or full of contrivances about the future. Some

even sit and think about their worldly pursuits; and as soon as released from their confinement, they enter eagerly into conversation upon the subject.

Our hearts are like the inn at Bethlehem, in which there was no room for Christ; or as it is described in this parable, like the "ground that is full of thorns," which spring up and choke the word.

If we would hear to profit, we must not think our own thoughts.

3. If we would enter into the gospel, and feel the importance of what we hear, let us beware that we *rest not in superficial impressions* or sensations; nor be content with any thing short of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The word does not profit, unless it be mixed with faith; a penitent and contrite heart is the only soil in which it will become fruitful.

There are many indeed who hear and feel, and who are often moved; and yet they are not brought to God, nor to forsake their carnal course of life.

They have some momentary pangs of conscience, some transient hopes, and even transient joys; and yet remain just as they were, in their sins and in their blood.

Such were those who are compared to the "stony ground," having "no depth of earth:" all was superficial and transient.

4. If we hear to profit, it must be *with hearts devoted to God*; and if so, we shall go with a view to be taught, and be governed by what we hear. To be guided, not by those who speak, but by what they speak, so far as it approves itself to our consciences, and to the oracles of God.

This is to be, not hearers only, but doers of the word, without which it will not profit us. This is the "good ground," or such as understood the word, and brought forth fruit with patience.

Hear then with application to yourselves, rather than others: hear devotionally rather than critically. Be not so much attentive to manner as to matter: hear with eternity in view, and as one that must give an account.

II. Consider the importance of such a hearing of the word.

1. Without this, the best means and the best ministers *will do us no good*. Much of Christ's ministry was lost upon his hearers. We may complain of the preacher, when the fault is in ourselves.

2. If we be not the better for what we hear, *we shall be the worse*, and our guilt will be so much the greater. The more light we have, the more inexcusable we are; and the gospel will be a savour of death unto death. John ix. 41.

3. The time of hearing *will soon be over*: we know not but every sermon we hear will be our last. Heb. iii. 7, 8.

4. We must give an account another day for all our privileges and opportunities. 2 Cor. v. 10, 11.

THE PENITENTIAL SACRIFICE.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, oh God, thou wilt not despise.—Psalm li. 17.

David, deeply humbled for his sin, compares his present state of mind to a sacrificial victim, ready to be offered upon the altar. Such victims were separated from the flock or herd, and set apart for God. The penitent also separates himself from customary intercourse, and mourns apart. He no longer considers himself as his own, but the Lord's; to whom he now dedicates himself, by a solemn and voluntary devotion. Psal. iv. 3. Rom. xii. 1. And as the typical sacrifices were put to death, in order to their being offered; so the penitent becomes dead to the world, and dead to sin, and is crucified together with Christ. The legal sacrifices were reiterated, year by year, and day by day. Heb. x. 11. So, though there may be special occasions for repentance as in the case of David; yet the sacrifice of a broken heart, and of a contrite spirit, must be the daily offering of every sinner who seeks acceptance with God.

I. Enquire what is included in this spiritual sacrifice.

A broken and a contrite spirit is not merely one that is distressed, nor one that is distressed for sin. Rachel was distressed for her children, and Micah about his gods; but it had nothing to do with true repentance. Cain and Judas sunk into despair, from a sense of guilt and wretchedness; but in them it was that kind of sorrow which worketh death, and not that repentance which is unto life. 2 Cor. vii. 10.

2. A truly contrite spirit is deeply affected with *the evil of sin*, as it dishonours God, and is injurious to ourselves and others. This is exemplified in the case of the Prodigal, Luke xv. 21: in the case of the Publican, Luke xviii. 13: and in that of David in the context, ver. 4.

The conviction of such a penitent is, that he has ruined himself, beyond the power of the whole creation to redeem; that if God should utterly destroy him, the sentence would be just; and if saved it must be of unbounded grace and love. Ephes. ii. 4, 5. A broken spirit is deeply contrite, and almost in danger of being swallowed up of grief. Psal. xxxviii. 3, 4. 2 Cor. ii. 7.

2. A contrite spirit groans under the burden of *inherent corruption*, as well as of sins actually committed: ver. 5, 6. A true penitent is made to know the plague of his own heart, and to cry out for deliverance. Rom. vii. 23, 24. Hence some christians, after they have attained to a good hope through grace, and walked humbly with God for many years, complain more bitterly than ever of indwelling sin, and can find no relief but in the atoning blood. Those who seek justification from their own sanctification, invert the order of the gospel; and it is impossible that imperfect obedience should yield perfect peace.

3. A broken and contrite spirit trembles at the least indications of

divine displeasure. Not only judgments inflicted, but judgments threatened or only apprehended, fill it with dismay. Isai. lxvi. 2. Psal. cxix. 120.

A true penitent trembles more at God's word than others do at his rod. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 18, 27. Job xxxi. 33.

4. A broken spirit patiently submits to the severest *chastisements*, and will bear the indignation of the Lord, from a conviction of having deserved it, and from the hope of future deliverance. Mic. vii. 9.

When God smites, the penitent also smites, and is at all times disposed to take part with God against himself. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him, and putteth his mouth in the dust. Lam. iii. 29, 30. Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

II. God's gracious acceptance of such a sacrifice.

This is expressed negatively: "a broken and a contrite spirit, oh God, thou wilt not despise." It is so worthless in itself, consisting of nothing but the groans and tears of a broken-hearted penitent, that he might well despise it; but he will not. It is presented with so many imperfections, and in a manner so unworthy of his notice, that he might reject both the offerer and his sacrifice; but he will not—

1. Because he delights more in *showing mercy*, than in whole burnt offerings or sacrifices. If he accepted the sacrifices under the law, it was only as they pointed to the great atonement to be made in the end of the world, and as they were accompanied with the penitential confessions of the offerer. And now especially, as these outward sacrifices have ceased, he will accept that which is spiritual. 1 Pet. ii. 5.

2. The sacrifices of a broken heart, offered up *in the name of Jesus*, cannot fail to be accepted, because they are perfumed with his incense, and presented through his intercession. Ephes. i. 6. Rev. viii. 4.

3. God has made *many promises* to the humble and the contrite, and has testified his acceptance of them and of their offering. Psal. xxxi. 20. cxlvii. 3. Isai. lvii. 13. See the case of Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. 20: of the Publican, Luke xviii. 14: and of the woman that was a sinner, vii. 50.

Let then the trembling soul be comforted: God will not despise the day of small things, nor let us despise it. Matt. xii. 20.

GOD AND THE REDEEMER MUTUALLY GLORIFIED.

Father, the hour is come: glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.—John xvii. 1.

We here find our Lord Jesus in a most solemn and affecting situation. He had often said that his hour was not yet come; but now it is fully arrived. Having comforted his disciples by an inimitable farewell

address, he here concludes it by a prayer, which was offered in their hearing.

It does not seem that our Lord had in these words an immediate respect to his sufferings: he appears rather to look through them, to the joy that was set before him. We have other instances of this, especially in John xii. 23, 24, 31.

The prayer presented in our text is intended to intimate, that the honour conferred on the Redeemer, in the establishment of his kingdom, would redound to the glory of God the Father.

I. Enquire in what respects God has glorified, and does still glorify his Son.

Whatever tends to raise him in the esteem of intelligent beings, or to exhibit the excellence of his character, is the means of glorifying him.

God is said to have 'magnified' his servant Joshua, when he wrought by him before the face of all Israel. Josh. iii. 7. So Christ was glorified from his first coming into the world: angels worshipped him: witness was borne to him at his baptism, also on the mount of transfiguration, and by the miracles which he wrought. But the principal part was to follow upon his sufferings and triumphs on the cross, as David was honoured when he had killed the uncircumcised Philistine: then they sung his praises in their song.

More particularly—

1. God has glorified his Son *in granting him the desire of his heart.*

It was an honour to Esther to be asked what was her petition, and what was her request; when she asked her own life, and the life of her people.

This honour was conferred on Christ; and he asked the life of his enemies, that he might be made a covenant for the people: their salvation was all that he desired. Isai. xlix. 8. liii. 11. Psal. ii. 8. xxi. 1, 2.

2. In bestowing mercy upon sinners *only in his name, and for his sake.*

It was an honour conferred on Joseph that he should have all things in his hand, and that all Egypt should be dependent upon him. It was also a great honour conferred on Job that he should be made a mediator, and that God should accept his three friends for his sake: this was more than enough to do away his reproach. Job xl. 8.

But to Jesus is given superior honour: God hears no prayer but in his name, gives no blessing but for his sake: and through his name the greatest sinners are pardoned, justified, and eternally saved.

3. God has glorified his Son in pouring forth *a richer effusion of grace* at the time of his ascension, than at any former period.

The mercy was to begin at Jerusalem, but to go on to the ends of the earth. Luke xxiv. 47.

It was at his coronation, that the captives among the gentiles were set free: God reserved that honour to grace his triumph.

All the blessings that have since been given to the church, are given with a view of honouring him, and in consequence of his intercession.

4. In investing him with *the government of the world*, in subsequence to the great ends of his mediation: ver. 2.

All that is

going on in the earth is only making way for his kingdom, and the accomplishment of his designs. Ephes. i. 20—23.

II. In what respects the glory of Christ redounds to the glory of the Father.

Wherein the Son is glorified, the Father is glorified also, and that by the same means. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to glorify Christ, and his work is to glorify the Father. The honour of the Son does not disagree with that of the Father: there is no jealousy here, though some have affected to be very jealous for the Father's honour. John v. 23. The interests of the Lawgiver do not suffer by those of the Saviour: they are inseparably blended together, and cannot exist apart.

1. The gospel provides for *the honour of God*, in such a way as nothing else could have done. The moral law glorifies him in asserting his authority: the sacrifices under the ceremonial law glorified him, as containing a virtual acknowledgment that sinners deserved to die for their offences. But the Son of God magnifies the law by his obedience, and makes it honourable; satisfies divine justice by his atonement, and glorifies the name of the Lord.

2. The mediation of Christ exhibits *the divine character* as infinitely glorious. All other mediums afforded only a partial view of his perfections; but his entire glory is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The light of nature was insufficient to show the path of life, and it effected no moral change in the state of the world. But wherever the doctrine of the cross is made known, idolatry and iniquity fall before it. God is glorified in the highest; on earth there is peace, and good will towards men.

3. Wherever Christ is believed in, the name of the Lord *is loved and feared*. The Lawgiver is adored wherever the Mediator is embraced. All the Christian graces do honour to God: repentance bears respect to his authority, faith implicitly obeys the dictates of his word, hope lifts up its eyes to his mercy seat, love cleaves to him as our portion, and his law is our delight. The believer is of the same mind as Christ, making the divine glory the ultimate end of all.

We learn from hence—

(1) What encouragement there is for sinners to *come to Christ*. The glory of God was the great hindrance in the way of acceptance: now it admits of a free salvation, and God is more abundantly glorified than he would have been in our condemnation. He can now pardon the greatest sins: look to him therefore, and be saved.

(2) The motives that should urge us to pray for *the success of the gospel*. It is Christ's own prayer, and we may unite with him in it: "Father, glorify thy son!" Let us lay hold of this plea: it has always been successful, and always will. If we love God and the Redeemer, we shall pray and labour to promote their mutual glory in the world.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE RELIGION.

One shall say, I am the Lord's: and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob: and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.—Isaiah xliv. 5.

It is remarkable how God, in his dealings with his people, mixes judgment with mercy. It was but a little before, that the prophet had foretold the captivity of Israel; and the godly amongst them must have been greatly dejected by the tidings; for what would become of the cause of God? For their encouragement however, their return is afterwards predicted, ch. xl. 1: and here, though the last chapter speaks of giving "Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproach," yet many great and precious promises are intermixed: ver. 1.

(1) The Lord calls them by endearing names: "Jacob my servant, and Israel whom I have chosen," ver. 1. He loved them notwithstanding all their provocations.

(2) He reminds them of his having "made and formed them;" not merely as creatures and as men, but as a nation and people peculiar to the Lord. He formed them for himself, to show forth his praise.

(3) He teaches them to draw inferences that he would "help them and bless them," and their posterity after them; and still he would remember his holy covenant, ver. 3.

(4) Instead of their being swallowed up by the heathen, the time would come when the gentiles should be accounted the seed of the church, and should "spring up as among the grass," ver. 4: and though not born of Abraham, they should say, "I am the Lord's." What promises are these! That which stumbled the carnal Jews, and even some of the primitive disciples, had been the support and comfort of the fathers of the church. Jer. xvi. 19.

Our text contains not only a promise of the conversion of the gentiles to the God of Israel; but this promise affords a lively description of the nature of conversion itself, and furnishes *several interesting characteristics of true religion*—

I. It is personal.

All that is here said is spoken of *individuals*. "One" and "another" shall say, "I" am the Lord's. Many things are mentioned in the context, and elsewhere, of God's having chosen Israel as a *people*; but that did not avail to their salvation. There was even then a distinction between Israel after the flesh, and after the Spirit; between Israelites "indeed," and such as were so in appearance only; and the children of the promise were counted for the seed. Psal. lxxiii. 1. John i. 47. Gal. iv. 28. Phil. iii. 3.

God has also favoured our *nation* with the gospel, and we are called

christians; but those only are such who have believed with the heart unto righteousness. The Lord favours some *towns* more than others; but religion is still a personal thing, and not national or parochial. Some *families* are also highly favoured in succession, one generation after another; yet religion is still personal, and there is no trusting to mere external privileges. Matt. iii. 9.

II. It is Cordial, or with the whole heart.

It includes the entire renunciation of every idol, and a full surrender of ourselves to the Lord.

It begins in the heart: there is such a thing as being called 'by the name of Israel,' and swearing by the God of Israel; yet not in truth, nor in righteousness. Isai. xlviii. 1. The Lord always had a right to our hearts, though he possessed them not: true conversion will lead us to say, "I am the Lord's."

1. Some for example have been given up to *open abominations*. They have been the slaves of brutal passions, wallowing in sin, and devoted to every species of iniquity; like the Corinthians, who were madly set upon their idols.

But grace reaches many of these; and now they are washed and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. vi. 11. The consequence of this is, a voluntary surrender of themselves to be the Lord's.

2. Others have been wholly *devoted to the world*. The love of money was the ruling passion: all their hearts and all their time was swallowed up in the cares of the world, and they were worshippers of the unrighteous mammon.

Yet we have seen in some of these, the love of the world giving way to the love of God, and a willingness to count all things but loss for Christ. Luke xix. 8. Phil. iii. 8.

3. Some have been in the highest degree *self-willed* and perverse. If reproved, they could not bear it; and he that reproved the scorner only got to himself a blot. Their tongues were their own, and they loved all devouring words.

But when religion reached the heart, these have become as little children, and all their pride has been abased. Now they are willing to sit at the feet of Jesus, and be numbered with his humble followers.

4. Some have felt a sensible and *strong aversion to God*, and every thing that is serious. They hated to think of him, or to be where he is worshipped: family prayer was a burden to them, and they wished to be free from the yoke of domestic authority. Yet such as these have been reconciled by the blood of the cross, and have given themselves up to God.

5. Others have been peculiarly prejudiced against those *doctrines and ordinances* that are the nearest to the truth, and have proclaimed war against their author.

Yet we have seen some of these brought to submit, and embrace those very truths they once opposed. Thus the scribes and pharisees who believed, joined the sect that was every where spoken against.

6. Not a few have been remarkable for their *carelessness and negligence* about their souls and eternal things. They have been light-minded, poor thoughtless creatures. Nothing had any effect upon them:

they were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, but drank their wine in bowls, and chaunted to the sound of the viol. Amos vi. 6. But we have seen their careless ones made to think, and lay their folly to heart, and eventually to say, We are the Lord's.

III. True religion is Decided.

Here is no hesitation; the surrender is full and unreserved. The language is not, I will or may be, but "I am" the Lord's. There are many cases of an opposite description, which we have frequent occasion to observe.

1. Some persons remain in *suspense*, between God and the world. They have had many convictions: the kingdom of heaven is near them, and they are not far off: and yet they have gone back to the world, to see whether they cannot make better of it.

2. Some still cleave to *their own righteousness*, and cannot wholly give it up. But true religion will constrain us to part with every thing, to be the Lord's.

3. Others take *no decided part* in religion. If God's cause prosper, they have no joy, no part in it. If it decline they do not mourn. These persons do not consider God's cause as their own, nor do they feel when it is dishonoured.

True religion is the opposite of all this: it is decidedly for Christ, and makes his cause our own. Its language is, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse. 1 Chron. xii. 18.

IV. It is Social.

They shall "call themselves by the name of Jacob, and surname themselves by the name of Israel." Those who are joined to the Lord will naturally feel a union with them that love him. Jacob and Israel were then the people of God; and the language of these converts would be, "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." Zech. viii. 21—23. There is a cleaving to the people of God, like that of Ruth to Naomi. Ruth i. 16.

There have been times and places in which, for a person to "subscribe" himself an Israelite or a Christian, would require a considerable sacrifice, and would cost him his liberty or his life. Yet true religion will cause us to cleave to the people of God, even in the worst of times. Mal. iii. 16. Acts iv. 23. ix. 26. Heb. xi. 25.

V. It is influenced by Example.

"One" shall say, I am the Lord's, "and another" shall call himself by the name of Jacob; "and another" shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord. It is here implied, that one person resigning himself up to the Lord and his people, would be the means of exciting others to do the same. The conversion of one sinner is oftentimes the occasion of converting another, and the obedience of one is followed by that of others. Hence the importance of social and family religion.

We are greatly influenced by example; and it is frequently seen, that if those who sustain a religious character live in the neglect of gospel ordinances, others will plead their conduct in justification of themselves, and consider them as of no importance. So on the contrary, if faithful and diligent in following Christ, others will be induced to follow the example.

Let us remember—(1) That we must either be the Lord's or Satan's. *Servants* we must be: choose ye therefore this day whom ye will serve.—(2) If we become the Lord's, it must be voluntarily: it must be the surrender of the heart, and of all we have to him.

SPIRITUAL OFFERINGS.

None shall appear before me empty.—Exodus xxiii. 15.

The Lord appointed to Israel three principal feasts in a year, one to be kept in the spring, another in the summer, and a third in the autumn; called the feast of the passover, the feast of pentecost, and the feast of tabernacles, all of them commemorative of their deliverance from Egypt. At these feasts all the male population were required to be present, to eat and worship, and rejoice before the Lord. Each was to bring provisions for himself and his family, and an offering for the altar, according to his circumstances, and none was to appear before the Lord empty. Deut. xvi. 16.

Under the gospel dispensation we are still required to come before God, and to worship him; and though we have no vicarious sacrifice to present, we must not come empty handed. There are other sacrifices that we may offer, and such as will be graciously accepted. 1 Pet. ii. 5.

Let us then enquire what are we to bring, when we come before the Lord?

1. His own *word of promise*, to remind him of the great things of which he has assured us, when we call upon him. Isai. xliii. 26. This has been the practice of the saints in all ages: they are God's remembrances: and though he cannot forget his promises, yet he loves to be reminded of them. 1 Chron. xvii. 25—27. And though we cannot plead our own performances, we are encouraged to plead his promises, as a sufficient warrant to expect both grace and glory at his hands. Gen. xxxii. 9—12. The best that we can say before the Lord is what he has said to us: if his word be the guide of our prayers, it will become the surest foundation of our hopes. He who has graciously promised, will faithfully perform; and if the promises be delayed, for the trial of faith and patience, we must not let them lie by us as dead

stock, but put them in suit, and humbly though confidently plead their accomplishment. Psal. cxix. 49. Hab. ii. 1.

2. Let us not forget to bring with us *the Saviour*; the name of Jesus in one hand and the promises in the other. Promises themselves will not do without Christ; we must plead them in his name, or they will finally miscarry. Dan. ix. 17. 2 Cor. i. 20. We may as well forget our errand at a throne of grace, as to forget Christ when we come there; for it is by him only that we have access. Ephes. iii. 12. In all our confessions, supplications and thanksgivings, we must make mention of his righteousness, and of that only.

3. Not only our wants but *our spiritual troubles* and conflicts must be brought before the Lord. If reviled and reproached for Christ's sake, let us do as Hezekiah did by Rabshakeh's letter, enclose it as it were in another letter, and send it up before the King of kings. 2 Kings xix. 14. So Job, when unjustly accused by his censorious friends, and persecuted by their invectives, committed his cause to him that judgeth righteously. Job v. 8. xxiii. 1—7. When earth affords us no relief, we must pour out our tears unto God. Job xvi. 16—20. Psal. xvii, 1, 2.

4. We must bring before the Lord our *outward afflictions* and troubles, of what kind soever they are. The sins and sorrows of the present life are too heavy for us to bear, and we are unable to stand alone under them. If we would have ease, or be supported under them, we must bring them before the Lord, that he may hear and strengthen us in the day of trouble. Psal. lv. 22. cxxxviii. 3. We must not only bring our burden to him, but cast it upon him, and leave it there; trusting in his promises, and committing all into his hands. 1 Pet. v. 7. If we struggle with our burden, it will only become the heavier: the only way is to let God do with us as seemeth good in his sight. 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26.

5. When we appear before God we should present to him *a broken and contrite heart*, the unutterable sighs and groans of his Holy Spirit. Next to the atoning sacrifice of his dear Son, no offering is more acceptable than this. Psal. li. 17. The vaunting pharisee despised the broken-hearted publican, and the publican thought meanly of himself; but God did not despise him. Luke xviii. 14. He had no pleasure in the blood of bulls and of goats; but the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit he graciously accepts. The forward are an abomination to the Lord, and the proud he beholdeth afar off; but he dwells with the humble, and revives the spirit of the contrite. Isai. lvii. 15. And if our hearts are hard and insensible, let us even bring them to him that he may soften them, and give us hearts of flesh. Ezek. xi. 9.

6. If we can bring nothing else, let us bring *our guilt and misery* before the Lord, all our aggravated guilt, and accumulated misery. If we cannot come before him as believers, we must come as sinners, vile and wretched as we are; if not to him as our Father, yet as helpless and fatherless. If thy sins are great remember his mercy is great, and the atonement is great; and grace will receive a brighter illustration in thy forgiveness. Psal. xxv. 11. Isai. lv. 7—10. Ephes. i. 7. The Lord hath laid on his dear Son the iniquity of us all; let us therefore come confessing our sins, and lay our hand on the bleeding sacrifice.

(1) If we may not appear before the Lord empty, let us enquire what have we brought to-day? Our bodies, it is true; but is that enough? It might indeed be something, if we presented them according to the apostle's direction. Rom. xii. 1.

(2) If in his earthly courts we may not appear before the Lord empty, how shall we appear before him at last, unless we have something better to present than our own righteousness, and are furnished with a better plea than our own deservings! Rom. iii. 19, 20.

THE SINNER'S REFUGE.

That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.—Hebrews vi. 18.

The apostle was greatly concerned for the perseverance of those who professed to believe in Jesus: when some of them seemed to turn back, he laboured with all his might to reclaim them. In some parts of the epistle he appears to deal sharply with them, in the beginning of this chapter especially, he faithfully warns them of the danger of apostasy; yet towards the close, he holds up the greatest encouragement to a perseverance in faith and holiness.

I. The description given of a true believer: "he has fled for refuge."

The allusion is to the cities of refuge under the law, which were provided for the manslayer. Deut. xix. 1—6.

The words before us are full of meaning, and contain three things in particular worthy of notice—

1. *The sinner's dangerous condition* is fully implied. He is exposed to some evil which threatens to overtake, and to overwhelm him with misery: this is common to all sinners. Death, like the avenger of blood, is out after him, and will soon overtake him. Wrath is in pursuit of him, and will finally come upon him, if he should not have reached the city in time. The sinner has transgressed God's holy law, and is under condemnation. If death should overtake you, ere you reach the city of refuge, you perish forever. Do not trifle therefore, do not loiter; but flee for thy life. Men would not be indifferent where life was in danger: and shall we, while our souls are in danger of the wrath to come!

2. Observe *the refuge provided*. This is called "the hope set before us." There can be no doubt what this means: it might be doubtful to some under the old testament, but surely it is not so to us.

Christ crucified is the hope of the hopeless, and the only name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. This is the Lamb which God has provided for a sin-offering: his death is the only

source of our life : here is a full salvation, sufficient for the chief of sinners. John iii. 14. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive. 1 John i. 9. In him all the threatenings of God are turned away, and there is no more wrath ; there is no objection from the nature, the number, or the aggravations of our offences. Isai. i. 18. Matt. xii. 31.

Hither it was that David fled, saying, Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. This is still the refuge of poor sinners, and here only can we find safety.

This hope is said to be *set before us*. God has set before us in his word, Christ and him crucified ; and has called our attention to this as the only foundation of hope. Isai. xxviii. 16.

He is a refuge *near at hand*, or immediately “before us.” No circuitous ways of preparation or amendment are prescribed : we are directed to look to him and be saved, to believe on him and receive eternal life. Were it otherwise, what had been the condition of the dying thief. Behold, I bring near my righteousness, and my salvation shall not tarry. Isai. xli. 13.

The way also is *made plain*, that those who flee for refuge may not be hindered in their flight. Deut. xix. 3. The sinner’s refuge is set so fully in view by the gospel, that every faithful minister, every true believer can direct you to it.

3. The *state of mind necessary to our fleeing to it*. Nothing indeed is necessary as a qualification, nor as giving us a right warrant to come, but the free invitations of the gospel to the most unworthy. Any sinner may come, but every sinner will not come ; only those who believe in Jesus.

Fleeing to this refuge implies *a sense of our sinful and dangerous condition*. This Paul had by means of the law : without this we are whole, and need not a physician. Those who flee for refuge are such as see themselves to be wholly sinful, and that God’s displeasure against them is altogether just.

It implies also our understanding and *believing the gospel*. It is not merely being driven by fear, but drawn by love. It is to have all our unwillingness removed, and to fall in with God’s way of salvation with the whole heart

II. The ground which God has given to such for “strong consolation.”

Two things are mentioned, and they are both immutable ; the promise, and the oath of God. Thus the Lord gave hope and comfort to Abraham, and thus he gives strong consolation to believers in Christ : ver. 13.

And why did he give the promise and the oath ? He did so to *Abraham*, in order to meet all his unbelieving fears, arising from the difficulties he had to encounter, and because of the length of time he would have to wait for the performance of the promise.

To us also God has promised and sworn to give eternal life, if we believe in his dearly beloved Son. Unbelief might suggest, ‘I am too sinful and unworthy, or there are insuperable difficulties in the

way, and I shall never obtain the prize.' But the promise and the oath contain an answer to every objection, and afford ground to the strongest assurance.

(1) We see what encouragement there is for us as sinners to come to Christ. We come not with uncertainty, but under the sanction of a promise.

(2) The motive for perseverance. If we hold out to the end, it will issue in eternal life.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP NOT CONFINED TO PLACE.

In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.—Exodus xx. 24.

When God had given the law on mount Sinai, and manifested himself to the congregation of Israel, he warned them of idolatry, and of every thing that might lead to it, or tend to pollute his worship. They were forbidden henceforth even to regard mount Sinai as more sacred than any other place, and were not allowed to do any thing in his worship which he had not commanded.

The text was designed to teach them that wherever God appointed them to worship, there they might expect his presence and blessing, and there only; that place itself would be of no account, unless the Lord recorded his name there.

I Briefly notice the scripture account of the indifference of place, with respect to the worship of God.

A superstitious attachment to place has been one of the modes of human degeneracy in all ages. The Samaritans made the essence of their religion to consist in this, and so also did the Jews. John iv. 14.

In the patriarchal age, *altars* were generally places of worship, as being suited to the manner of that time, when the worship principally consisted in offering sacrifices.

Some of these altars were simply *occasional*, or for a time only, while others were more stately resorted to. Hence we read of Abraham's building an altar to Jehovah wherever he went; so did Isaac and Jacob after him. Moses did the same at Rephidim, Elijah at Carmel, and David at the floor of Arunnah. 1 Kings xviii. 32. 2 Sam. xxiv. 25. The one when he contended with Baal's prophets, and the other when he stayed the pestilence; these were only occasional.

There were other altars which were designed for a *continuance*: these were erected wherever the people of God used to pitch their tents. Abraham, at his first entering into Canaan, built an altar, and called

upon the name of Jehovah. Gen. xii. 8. Jacob also built one at Succoth, and at Bethel. Gen. xxxiii. 18. xxxv. 1.

These altars were built by the Lord's people until the time of *David*. God then chose Jerusalem, and recorded his name there: thither therefore the tribes went up three times a year from all parts of Judea, and proselytes came up to worship from among the gentiles. We have an account of this at the feast of pentecost, in Acts ii. 7—11.

God had all along designed to fix on a *place of worship*, having told Moses that he would choose for himself a habitation, whither they should seek, and whither they should come. Deut. xii. 5, 13, 14. Under that dispensation therefore, Jerusalem was the place where men 'ought to worship.' There was also a fitness in this. The whole nation of Israel was a kind of theocracy: their civil government was of divine appointment, and Jehovah was their King. They therefore had a royal city, the city of the great King, and that was the seat of worship. Psal. xlviii. 1, 2.

But as soon as *the Messiah came*, this peculiarity was no more. The worship of God should neither be confined to this mountain, nor to the city of Jerusalem. John iv. 21. Christ himself sanctioned all places by his own example; he neither confined himself to the temple, nor to the synagogue. He preached and worshipped in private houses, on board a ship, and in the open air.

His disciples also met in private houses, in upper rooms, and in public schools; and Paul took his leave of the Ephesian elders on the sea shore, where they kneeled down and prayed.

After *the death of the apostles*, the professors of christianity soon began to degenerate from the pure and simple worship of the new testament, to a superstitious attachment to place, especially after the time of Constantine; when they began to build churches on the tombs of departed saints, dedicating the buildings to them, and calling them after their names; and this practice is continued to the present day.

The same sort of superstition induced multitudes to go on pilgrimage, and to wage the holy war as it was called, to recover Jerusalem out of the hands of the Mahomedans. But God wisely ordered it otherwise, and defeated their chimerical enterprise.

Yet the same spirit remains to this day, and a superstitious regard is paid to places by common people in general, like that of the woman of Samaria.

II. Observe, that the great thing to be regarded is, that God's "name be recorded there."

This expression seems to allude to the custom of great men, in erecting a pillar or monument to perpetuate their memory. Thus Absalom having no children, built a pillar for this purpose. 2 Sam. xviii. 18.

It seems to imply, that the world in general have *forgotten God*, and would utterly forget him, if he did now and then as it were erect a memorial for himself.

Wherever a number of real Christians meet together for the worship of God, and the maintenance of pure religion, there is a memorial, and there the Lord records his name.

Three things however are necessary for this purpose—

1. That *his gospel be preached in its purity*. God's name must be exalted in the ministry of the word, or it cannot be said to be recorded; and with this his presence and blessing stand connected. It is needful that we examine the Scriptures for ourselves, and not retain an attachment to principles without understanding them, and seeing that they are according to the oracles of God. The church of God is said to be the pillar and ground of truth; that on which it is inscribed, and by which it is upheld. 1 Tim. iii. 15. If the truth as it is in Jesus be given up, the glory is departed, and our house is left unto us desolate.

2. That the *worship of God be maintained* according to his own commands. He will never suffer his worship to be corrupted by the doctrines and commandments of men; and if any one attempt this, his name is no longer recorded there: for 'if thou lift up a tool upon mine altar, thou hast polluted it.' Exod. xx. 25.

3. That his worship be not only attended to according to rule, but also *in spirit and in truth*. We have as much to fear from formality, as from a corruption of christian worship.

III. Wherever God's name is recorded, there we have reason to hope for his presence and blessing. "I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

The Lord dwelt with the patriarchs, and blessed them; with the church at Jerusalem, Psal. cxxxii. 11; and with his churches under the gospel. And whenever they had most of the truth among them, and maintained his worship in its purity, they had most of the divine presence.

He will still bless, where his name is recorded. The Holy Spirit will delight to dwell there, and to bless his word to the increase of the godly, and to their edification and comfort.

But if these things be wanting, let the place be what it may, God will not dwell there. When the calves of Jeroboam were set up at Bethel, it became a Bethaven, a house of iniquity. God abhorred his own temple, when his name ceased to be honoured there. 'Behold your house is left unto you desolate.' What is Rome and other places once famous for religion, now that christianity has been corrupted! If the truths of the gospel and the purity of worship be not maintained amongst us, God will depart, and leave us to barrenness and desolation.

THE SCORNER REPROVED.

Fools make a mock at sin.—Proverbs xiv. 9.

In the esteem of this pious philosopher, religion is the highest wisdom, and sin the greatest folly. Such is the general purport of his characteristics ; but in the text especially, he has marked with the most degrading epithet a species of levity deserving of the severest rebuke. It is not enough for some men that they are sinners : they must add folly to their depravity, and treat the greatest of all evils as a light and trifling concern.

I. Enquire who they are that may be said to “make a mock at sin.”

1. They are those who excuse or palliate the evil of their own conduct, treating sin as a light matter, and saying of it as Lot did of Zoar, Is it not a little one. Some plead nature, some custom, some necessity, and others example: but as the prophet said, Will ye plead for Baal? Is it possible to excuse or justify so great an abomination? Every attempt to conceal its enormity, to throw the blame on others, or on the circumstances in which we are placed, is a fearful sign of impenitence, and of that inconsiderate levity which the wise man so severely reprehends. Prov. xxviii. 13.

2. Those make a mock at sin who can commit it without regret, and glory in their shame, instead of being humbled for it. Phil. iii. 19.

There are scorers who turn sin into a jest, and even boast of their wickedness. Prov. x. 23. Injuries done to fellow men, such as are adapted to fill the mind with horror and detestation, are too often made the subject of unfeeling ridicule. 2 Sam. ii. 14—16. Prov. xxvi. 18, 19. Some will dare to sin for the diversion of others, and to commit acts of public injustice for the sake of a little popularity. Hos. vii. 3. Acts xii. 2, 3. xxiv. 27.

3. Those who rush into sin upon the slightest temptation, show how lightly they regard it, and with what contempt they treat the divine authority. The profane Esau could sell his birthright for a mess of pottage, and the covetous Judas betray his Master for thirty pieces of silver. Zech. xi. 13. From such mean and mercenary motives do men sacrifice their conscience and their souls ; and not only sell themselves to work wickedness, but sell themselves for nought.

4. Some make a mock at sin by scoffing at their reprovers, and treating them with utter disdain. Such was the conduct of Ahab towards Micaiah, and of Herod towards John the Baptist. 1 Kings xxii. 8. Mark vi. 18, 19. On the same principle, parental authority is frequently despised, and ministerial fidelity treated with levity and scorn. Prov. xiii. 1.

5. How lightly some men regard sin may be seen in their rejection of the atonement, and substituting in its stead their own endeavours to

appease the divine anger, and to commend themselves to God. All self-righteousness is founded in light thoughts of sin, and leads to a rejection of the only way of salvation. Prov. vii. 36.

6. Some even go so far as to take pleasure in the sins of others, and turn into a scene of mirth what will issue in lamentation and woe. Hab. ii. 15. It is sufficiently evil to mock at human suffering, but inconceivably more so to mock at that which leads to endless perdition; first to tempt men to the commission of sin, and then to be diverted with their impiety.

II. The folly and danger of such conduct.

It is sufficiently to our shame that we are sinners; but it is the height of folly to make a mock at sin.

1. Because of its intrinsically evil nature. Sin had its origin in the bottomless pit, 1 John iii. 8; whence it issued, and infected the nature of man, and is opprobiously termed 'the filthiness' of the flesh and of the spirit. 2 Cor. vii. 1. It is the disgrace of our nature, and by it we have debased ourselves even unto hell. Isai. lvii. 9. It is the sum of all evil: from hence proceed evil thoughts, evil speaking, an evil conscience, and evil deeds. It is worse than death, for death would have no sting without it; and worse than hell, for it is sin that creates the never-dying worm, and the fire that cannot be quenched.

2. The present consequences of sin show the extreme folly of making light of it. It is pregnant with all the evils that exist in the world, of whatever kind or degree; and who can calculate this mighty sum? Whatever calamity befalls a sinner in the present life, it may truly be said to him in the language of the prophet, 'Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee.' Jer. iv. 18. The ruin and distress brought upon the conscience has induced others, besides Judas, to cast themselves directly into hell, to get rid of their horror and despair. And even where sin is repented of and pardoned, it brings unutterable distress upon the soul. Psal. xxxviii. 3.

3. The sufferings of Christ for sin, and the price paid for our redemption, awfully demonstrate the folly and madness of making light of sin. Behold the Son of God prostrate in Gethsemane, witness his agony and bloody sweat; see him on the cross, and hear his dying cries; and then say whether the cause of these sufferings can be regarded with indifference, or be made a matter of idle jest. No where does the evil of sin appear so great as in the sacrifice of the Son of God. Isai. liii. 4, 5.

4. The final ruin and destruction which sin will bring upon the soul in a future world. Could we descend into the dark and silent chambers of the grave, and behold the bodies of the wicked crumbling into dust, and becoming a prey to rotteness and worms; could we draw aside the veil that conceals from us the world of spirits, and plunge into all the thickest horrors of the bottomless pit, and see the justice of God pouring out a tempest of fire upon lost souls to all eternity; surely we could not be disposed to make a mock at sin, or live any longer in a state of impenitence and unbelief. A fire is kindled in his wrath, that shall burn to the lowest hell.

Let mockers beware then, lest their hands be made strong, and they be left to wonder and perish.—Be not deceived: God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Those who now deride religion, and make a mock at sin, will find that God also will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh. Prov. i. 25—27.

INVETERATE DEPRAVITY.

Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.—Isaiah xxvi. 10.

The former part of this chapter speaks of times when it shall go well with the church of God, and foretels the glory of the latter day: ver. 1. It seems however, that great and awful judgments are to precede that event, and that the world is to learn righteousness by them. Yet even then there will be various exceptions: some parts of the earth will be barren, though replenished with the holy waters, proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb: some whom neither judgments nor mercies will reclaim. The text therefore may be considered as a description of the inveterate depravity of a wicked mind, which breaks through every obligation, and transgresses every boundary in its way.

We may notice the following things—

(1) That God shows favour to the wicked, in the dispensations of his *providence*. These are adapted to work upon an ingenuous mind, for the goodness of God leadeth to repentance: yet the wicked will not learn righteousness.

(2) God shows favour by granting the *society of the godly*. This has great influence on some, and been the means of their conversion, while others have been restrained by it. But to the incorrigible, even this is without effect.

(3) The awful *majesty of God* has been displayed, in his word and in his works, both in a way of judgment and of mercy; and this has had effect on some. But to a wicked mind, all these displays are made in vain.

More particularly—

I. Consider the favourable or merciful dispensations of God which are shown to many, who yet never learn righteousness by them.

Kindness and mercy will overcome an ingenuous mind sooner than threats; and most men think so well of themselves as to imagine, that if God would withdraw his hand, and not make them suffer with his terror, they should be won to love and obey. Yet experience proves the contrary. Rom. ii. 3.

Who can survey *his own life*, without perceiving a train of favours? Tender parents have been given us, a watchful providence has guarded our lives, favour may be seen in the age and country in which we were born, having means of instruction in abundance. Yet amidst all this, how incorrigible have we been.

Divine forbearance has been long exercised, and the threatenings of wrath have been suspended. Some perhaps have imprecated curses, yet they have not come upon them: have delighted in lies and falsehood, yet God has not destroyed the false tongue, as in the case of Ananias. You have not cared for God, while he has cared for you still all this favour has been shown in vain.

Perhaps you have been *threatened with death*. The Lord's hand has been lifted up, and you were much alarmed, and vowed to live to him. He has withdrawn his hand, and lengthened out your life, and given you tranquility: for bitterness you had great peace. Yet what has been the issue.

Above all, God has *sent his Son*, and his gospel to you: to invite you to come, and to persuade you to be reconciled. Yet all this has been in vain. Such is the state of a wicked mind.

II. Notice the advantages of religious society, which have also produced no good effect.

In an absolute sense, there is no "land of uprightness" in this world; but comparatively there is. Judea was such, when compared with heathen nations. *There* were the lively oracles, the worship of God, and the example of thousands of righteous men. So that to be wicked there, implied a far greater degree of obduracy than in other places, where such advantages were not enjoyed. Thus it is in all situations, where true religion has obtained a footing. Many who are cruel and brutal in foreign countries, are often found as amiable and as kind as other people in their own country, where the prevalence of christian principle demands it. It denotes great wickedness, to break through all these restraints, especially in religious connections; in towns, in congregations, in families, where the gospel is professed.

Yet there are some who, amidst all this, remain hardened and unmoved: they still do unjustly, and go on sinning against God.

III. Consider the majesty of the Lord, which is also displayed without effect.

This deters many; but not all. Majesty denotes the union of those attributes which belong to God as the Sovereign of the universe, and which denominate him great and glorious.

The majesty of the Lord is displayed in the works of *nature*, in thunders, lightnings, storms, and earthquakes. But even here the wicked will not 'behold it,' but are content to ascribe every thing to second causes.

It is displayed in the precepts and threatenings of *his word*. The voice of the Lord is full of majesty: here he speaks as a Lawgiver and a Judge. Yet all this is overlooked.

His *judgments*, which are abroad in the earth, display his awful glory. Wars, famines, pestilences, and a host of evils. But here again all is ascribed to second causes, and God is overlooked.

Learn from hence—

(1) The impossibility of a wicked man going to heaven. He would be wicked and miserable even there, and would “not behold the majesty of the Lord,” so as to be properly impressed with it.

(2) The insufficiency of all means to turn the sinner’s heart. Some have indeed supposed, that though the law will not do it, yet the gospel will. But neither of these suppositions are true: the heart will yield to nothing but the arm of Jehovah. Isai. liii. 1.

THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil: for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.—Ephesians vi. 11—13.

In the time of danger, when a powerful and malignant enemy is seeking our destruction, it would be natural to arm ourselves against him, that we may withstand the meditated attack. As christians we are engaged in a more important conflict than any pertaining to this world. “Wrestle not with flesh and blood,” not with mortal men like ourselves, but with evil spirits and evil things. Hence we are called to be on our guard, to put on the armour which is provided for us, and to take good heed to the direction given us.

I. Consider the danger to which we are exposed: ver. 12.

As it is in other cases, so it is in this; our greatest danger lies in not feeling our danger, and so not being prepared to meet it.

1. View *the enemy* we have to contend with. He is one who bears an *inveterate hatred* against us, and seeks nothing less than our destruction or eternal overthrow. He hates us as God’s creatures, but especially as those who have been rescued from his power, and taken up arms against him: nothing now will satisfy him but our eternal ruin. It is therefore a struggle of life for life: if we do not overcome him, he will overcome us. It is in vain to think of being neuter, or making peace with him.

2. He is *mightier* than we are; and unless we have help from above, we are no match for him. We know but little of the power of

wicked spirits, abstractly considered; but viewed as the god of this world, Satan has all its temptations in alliance with him. We know what power there is in these: with these he has cast down many mighty, yea many strong men have been slain by him. With these he overcame our first parents, and with these also he attacked the second Adam, though in vain.

3. He is an *artful enemy*. We are told of the "wiles of the devil," hiding his designs, and falling upon us when we least expect it. We are in his net before we are aware, and when providence seems to smile upon us. Deut. viii. 12. He studies our propensities, and suits his temptations to them. Ephes. iv. 14.

4. He is *invisible*. If he were "flesh and blood," like ourselves, we might beware; but his influence is like the nightly pestilence, which walks in darkness. When least suspected, danger is nigh.

5. He is *near us*, as it were within our gates. The safety of a nation menaced by an enemy, often depends on his being kept at a distance, by walls or seas; or fortresses of defence. But here it is supposed that the enemy has entered into our borders, and that we have no other resource left but to struggle as it were for life. It is not a contest with a distant enemy, but a kind of closing conflict: "we wrestle."

6. What is still worse, he has *a strong party within us*. He was victorious with our first parents, when this was not the case, and when he had no party within: much greater therefore is the danger now. If we do not obtain the victory, we shall ourselves be overcome, and perish in the conflict.

7. On *the issue* of this warfare depend all our hopes. If we "stand" not in this, our loss when defeated can never be retrieved.

II. The armour provided for us: ver. 13.

Three things may here be observed—

1. In general, this armour is *the grace of the gospel*, believed and trusted in: this is opposed to human might or strength: ver. 10.

In common warfare it is usual for the commanders to persuade their enemies to think highly of their strength: but in this it is quite the reverse. We must go as Israel was always taught to do, as having no might of our own, but deriving all our strength from the Lord. 2 Tim. ii. 1.

2. It is described as *a whole or perfect armour*, sufficient to defend us in every part.

"Truth" is the girdle to strengthen us: "righteousness" a breastplate: the "gospel" of peace as shoes, by which we shall be able to trample upon the lion and the adder, the young lion and the dragon; "faith" is a shield; "salvation," or the hope of eternal life a helmet.

All this armour is to be drawn from the truths of the everlasting gospel.

3. The *use to be made of it is*, that we may be able to "withstand," and to face the enemy. There is no armour for the back: he that fleeth is wholly defenceless, and must inevitably fall.

III. The necessity of "putting on" this armour, or "taking" it to ourselves: ver. 11.

Armour is of no avail, unless it be used. The application of the gospel is that which proves our security. Some persons make no use of it, and others a bad use: but it must be our concern to make a good use of it. Use it in prayer, in other duties, in afflictions, in temptations: its truths, its promises and directions, will avail us in the whole of our warfare.

IV. The inducement to do so; "that we may withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

It is here supposed that there are times of *special danger*, called "the evil day." Times in which we are attacked with peculiar force; such as seasons of persecution and temptation. It was an evil day to Joseph, when solicited by his faithless mistress; but he successfully withstood. It was an evil day to Nehemiah, when Sanballat and others came to hinder the work of the Lord; to our Saviour, when the prince of this world came against him; and to the martyrs when they had to resist even unto blood, striving against sin. But they withstood in the evil day; and having done all, they were enabled to keep their ground.

Some of God's servants, through neglecting their armour, have been *foiled* in the day of battle: of this there are many affecting examples.

The phrase, "having done all to stand," is very impressive: this is to keep the field at last. It is this which gives decision to a battle: we may be overcome, but if we overcome at last, it will be well.

We may obtain a victory now and then, and yet be finally conquered; and "having done all," to fall at last. Oh of what importance is it to be finally victorious!

These weapons are not only necessary in the spiritual warfare, but also in temporal dangers; and though we may never be exposed to scenes of military conflict, we must all in some form or other have to encounter the king of terrors; and for this, nothing can prepare us but "taking to ourselves the whole armour of God."

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT.

Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.—2 Corinthians ix. 15.

As sin naturally contracts the heart by rendering it selfish, so true religion as naturally expands it by causing us to feel for others. Hence the primitive christians who abounded in every other grace, abounded also in that of genuine benevolence; and the churches of Achaia are exhibited as an example of this kind of piety, to the church at Corinth.

The sententious exclamation of the apostle refers no doubt to the wonderful grace of God in the gift of his Son. Some indeed have thought that it refers only to the liberality of the Corinthians ; but it is very true, that this spirit is the gift of God ; but it would hardly have been called "unspeakable." Besides, it is usual for the new-testament writers to derive motives to obedience from the doctrine of the cross. Hence humility is enforced from the consideration of Christ's abasement, Phil. ii. 5 : and kindness to the poor, from Christ's becoming poor for us, 2 Cor. viii. 9. The words before us are of a similar import. It is as if the apostle had said, What are all our gifts one to another, compared with that in which we are all partakers.

I. Notice the import of a gift.

1. A gift is something *freely bestowed*, or set before us for acceptance : and especially when speaking of God's gifts, it is something given without either price or reward, or any consideration of the worthiness of the receiver. All his gifts are free and undeserved, and perfectly gratuitous. If they were purchased, they would no longer be of grace. Rom. xi. 35, 36.

2. A gift, though freely given, *requires to be received*. God gave to the Jews the true bread from heaven, yet they never received it. John vi. 32. Christ came to his own, but his own received him not. John i. 11. He made a feast, and invited many ; but the greater part made light of it. Matt. xxii. 3. But believers are described as 'having' the Son, and so they have life. In order therefore to our having a revealed interest in Christ, he must be had in actual possession, and be received by us as the gift of God.

Christ is given to be a kind of *public property*. He became incarnate, lived and suffered, died and rose again ; not for himself, but for others. God gave him to be the head of the body, the church ; but the head lives not for itself, but for the body. He must therefore be received, before he can become ours.

II. Consider the magnitude of this gift.

It is said to be "unspeakable : " it far exceeds the power of language to express its worth. All that can be said is, that 'God so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son.' John iii. 16.

1. Its innate or *intrinsic worth* is unspeakable. Great stress is laid on his being 'the Son of God : ' though we cannot draw a parallel between divine and human sonships, yet they agree in this, that they are amongst the greatest of all gifts. Hence Abraham's giving up Isaac was so much accounted of : it was his son, his only son, whom he loved. Christ's being called the Son of God, denotes how precious he was in the esteem of the Father, and how inestimable was his obedience ; that though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience.

It was this which gave efficacy to his sacrifice : it was the blood of Jesus Christ 'his Son.' Hence also the dignity of his priesthood. Heb. iv. 14. 1 John i. 7.

Now *the worth* of this gift may be estimated by the value which God sets upon it, who judges of persons and things as they really are. Christ is disallowed indeed of men, but 'chosen of God and precious.' With what complacency he speaks of him in prophecy, Isai. xlii. 1; so also in Matt. xvii. 5. Heb. i. 8.

So high a value did he set upon his obedience unto death, as to reckon the salvation of the Jews to be 'a light thing' in reward of it. Isai. xlix. 6.

Hence it was, that a few hours suffering on his part was equivalent to eternal punishment on ours; and his one offering for ever perfected them that are sanctified. Heb. x. 10, 14.

2. The magnitude of the gift may be seen in Christ's being *given as a sacrifice*. This was an end truly great and wonderful.

It was something for Hannah to give her son Samuel to the Lord for ever, though it was only to be a priest in his house. It was more for Abraham to give up his son Isaac: this indeed was great love.

But how eminently true is that saying, 'HEREIN is love!' not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent *his Son* to be the propitiation for our sins.' 1 John iv. 10. iii. 16. All other instances of love disappear before it: we need not talk of the love of parents to their children, of the love of friends to each other, or of the attachment between David and Jonathan. 'HEREIN is love!'

3. His being given as a sacrifice *for sinners*, enhances the value of the gift.

Great things have been done for worthy objects: the three men in David's army risked their lives, in breaking through the Philistine host to fetch him water from the well of Bethlehem; but they said his life was worth ten thousand of theirs.

But the gift of Christ is a sacrifice for the utterly unworthy: we were enemies, who deserved to be made a sacrifice to divine vengeance. 'Not that we loved God;' no indeed! but were at enmity against him. Rom. v. 7, 8.

God has sometimes given great things in answer to prayer, the prayer of faith: but here was no prayer, the gift came unsolicited. Ephes. iii. 20.

4. The important *ends to be answered by it*, show the magnitude of the gift.

It does not comport with the wisdom of God, to make a great sacrifice for the accomplishment of an unimportant object. When Israel was to be redeemed, he gave Egypt for their life, and threw their host into the red sea. After this he gave Ethiopia for their ransom; and Babylon was afterwards devoted to destruction in order to save them. Isai. xliii. 3, 4. 2 Chron. xiv. 9—15.

All these ends were great, but not so great as this, the glory of his own name in the everlasting salvation of his people. This is an object of such magnitude, that all other things are made subservient to it. Heb. ii. 10. Ephes. ii. 7.

5. The gift of Christ is *the sum of all his other gifts*, and greater than all of them put together. Rom. viii. 32.

It was great for God to suffer our manners in the wilderness: greater still to forgive: greater still to put us among the children, and make us heirs of eternal life.

But the greatest of all is the gift of his Son. Hence the song of heaven is not so much about our being saved, as the means by which our salvation is accomplished. Rev. i. 5, 6. v. 9.

III. The return it becomes us to make for all this.

“Thanks be unto God.” Surely our gratitude is *the least* that we can offer. There may have been times in which we have thought, what would we give for favours so infinite as this. Our health, our liberty, our life has appeared as nothing in comparison. We have been willing to suffer the loss of all things, that we might but win Christ, and be found in him; and have said, God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!

But God says in effect, ‘Keep these till I call for them. Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me, and to him will I show the salvation of God.’ He requireth only ‘the calves of our lips.’ Hos. xiv. 2. 1 Pet. ii. 5.

This is also *the greatest* return that we can offer. God esteems a grateful heart above all sacrifices, and requires that we should love him, even as he has loved us. He does not look for any other return; his yoke is easy, and his burden light.

(1) We see the way of salvation. It is a free gift, originating in sovereign grace; and as such it must be received. Do you value it, and think highly of the Saviour, even as God himself does?

(2) Let us learn to act on christian principles, in the exercise of our benevolence. Selfishness is utterly unworthy of those who have received so inestimable a gift. Let us be of the same mind as God: in all our gifts, let us give freely and largely, as he has done.

Oh if Christ had been as reluctant to part with his blood, as some are of their money, where had we been!

THE SINNER'S DOOM.

I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.—Jeremiah xviii. 17.

So inveterate was the attachment of the people of Israel to their idols, and so incorrigible amidst national calamities, that God at length determined, not only to bring upon them the threatened captivity in Babylon, but to leave them in the hands of their enemies, without pity or compassion; and like a friend aggrieved, would utterly forsake them in the day of trouble.

1. Consider the evil threatened: “I will show them the back, and not the face.”

Here we may observe,

1. God sometimes shows his back in a way of *mercy*; as in the case of Moses, when he caused his goodness to pass before him because

he could not see his face and live. Exod. xxxiii. 23. In compassion to our weakness, he holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it. Job xxvi. 9. Here we see as through a glass darkly; but in heaven, face to face.

2. The Lord sometimes shows his face in a way of *wrath*, as well as his back in a way of mercy. He has an angry and a frowning face, when sin is to be punished; and it is set against them that do evil. Lev. xvii. 10. xx. 3. 1 Pet. iii. 12. God's regard to his people is expressed by his looking upon them, Isai. lxvi. 2: and his displeasure against the wicked is indicated in a similar manner. Exod. xiv. 24. The presence of God is that alone which constitutes the happiness of heaven, and the misery of hell: his face is either the most delightful, or the most dreadful of all objects.

3. In the words before us the Lord threatens to hide his face, and to turn his back upon his people, in a way of *wrath and indignation*. This was a part of Job's affliction, ch. xxiii. 8: and also of David's Psal. lxxxviii. 14. The blessed Redeemer himself also made the hidings of God's face the subject of his bitter lamentation on the cross. Psal. xxii. 1.

The Lord may thus hide himself for a moment from his people, and be wroth: but towards the wicked it denotes his total abandonment of them, and delivering them up to deserved wrath and punishment.—Particularly, when the Lord says, "he will show them the back, and not the face," it includes,

(1) The withdrawal of that providential care and protection, which was to be the peculiar privilege of the people of Israel, 2 Chron. xvi. 9: and leaving them exposed to every evil and danger. Thus he dealt with the apostate Jewish church: he broke down its wall, that it might be trodden down. Isai. v. 5.

(2) A direct expression of his displeasure, as when we turn our back upon those who have offended us. So Christ once turned his back upon Peter, because he was an offence to him. Matt. xvi. 23. God for a time may thus show his displeasure to his own people, but will not utterly forsake them. Psal. lxxxix. 30—33.

(3) It intimates a final departure: giving them up to walk in their own way, and to follow their own counsel. 'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.' To be abandoned as incorrigible, is the sorest of all judgments: and woe unto them, when I depart from them, saith the Lord. Hos. ix. 12.

(4) God's departing from an individual, or from a people, shows that he will hear no more prayer, and will no more be favourable towards them; and this it is that seals their doom. Job xxxiv. 29. Jer. xiv. 11, 12. xv. 1.

II. The time when the threatened evil shall be inflicted: "in the day of their calamity."

There is a day of trouble coming upon the wicked, an appointed day, a dark and gloomy day: and oh then for God to turn his back, and leave the sinner to his fate! Yet such will be the doom of the finally impenitent—

1. A little of this may be seen, amidst the calamities of the present life. What was the condition of Saul, when God had departed from him? 1 Sam. xxviii. 15. Of Jerusalem, when he would return to his temple no more? Matt. xxiii. 27, 38.

2. What then will be the state of the wicked in the last day, when God shall for ever disown and for ever forsake them! That will indeed be the day of their calamity: there is none like it: and all entreaties will be in vain. Rev. vi. 16, 17. They had said unto God, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways: and now God will depart, and they shall see his face no more.

(1) Let the unbeliever beware, and let him well consider what he shall answer, when the Lord cometh forth to punish him. Jer. xiii. 21.

(2) If a christian finds himself forsaken in the day of trouble, let it cause great searchings of heart; and like Israel of old, let him lament after the Lord. 1 Sam. vii. 2.

(3) Let all remember, there is still a refuge from the storms of life, and from the wrath to come. Prov. xviii. 10.

COMMENDATION OF THE SERVICE OF GOD.

No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.—Isaiah liv. 17.

The prophet, in the last seven verses of this chapter, seems to refer to times that are yet to come. The following particulars may be observed—

(1) That the church is addressed, prior to that period, as being *tossed with tempests*. Such are its long afflictions during the reign of anti-christ, and amid the tempestuous changes of the world: ver. 11.

(2) Under the imagery of a temple, the Lord promises to *build her up*, and that also with the richest materials: ver. 11, 12.

(3) That her children should be Israelites indeed, or *real christians*; not bastards, but sons; not outwardly, but inwardly religious: ver. 13.

(4) That she should be blessed with *abundance of peace*, and be secured from the attacks of all her enemies: ver. 14—16.

Though the text may be considered as a prophecy of future times, it nevertheless contains a truth which is common to all times and ages of the church; and may properly be considered as a commendation of the service of God.

Here we may again remark—

1. That there are kind and *generous masters*, to be found amongst men, and it will be natural for such to care for those who serve them.

Some of them also are mighty, as well as kind, and have great things in their power.

But none of them can engage to do what God has promised to his servants: even the most faithful and successful servants of kings cannot always be secure against their enemies, but are often overcome, and lose their lives. But here, "No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper."

2. The most upright and diligent servants amongst men are exposed to the *breath of slander*, and may be ruined by it. But God's servants shall triumph over all; not only in the field of warfare, but at the bar of judgment. "Every tongue shalt thou condemn."

3. The best of servants amongst men, though they may expect kindness, do not expect to be treated *as children*. But God treats all his servants as such, and gives them a "heritage," which is the portion of a son.

I. Enquire what it is that denominates us the servants of the Lord.

There is a sense in which all men are his servants, for all must in one way or other serve him, and shall be made to give him glory. So did Nebuchadnezzar, and so shall all his successors. But a servant of the Lord, in the sense of our text, is one that serves him freely, and from choice.

Particularly—

1. It supposes that *we are born again*. To be God's servant, is what no man is by nature. By grace alone are we made willing to serve; and the origin of this disposition is described in Rom. vi. 17. It consists in our being brought to acquiesce in the gospel way of salvation, and so yielding up ourselves as servants to righteousness.

2. It implies that we take *God's will for our rule*. If we become his servants, we must not be the slaves of the world, of its customs, of our own lusts. In this case, the words of Joshua will apply: 'Ye cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God:' ye cannot serve God and mammon. What wilt thou have me to do, is the enquiry of a renewed mind; and the eye of a servant of God must be single to his authority and glory.

3. It denotes *faithfulness*, diligence, and perseverance to the end of life. The apostles called themselves the servants of Christ, and they served him with all their might. They considered their time, their powers, and their life, not as their own, but his. They neither go out free any more, nor desire it, but are faithful unto death.

II. Notice their distinguished heritage.

It is observable that what is here promised, refers to the present life, as something that is over and above that eternal inheritance which is promised and prepared for them in the world to come. It relates to the security and comfort of the godly, while in a world of enemies.

1. It is supposed that there are *many weapons formed against the servants of God*. Satan and his agents are always at work in

forging them. Like the smith that is ever blowing his coals, to bring forth the instruments of death; so is the enemy preparing destruction for us: ver. 16.

Under the old testament, when the church existed in a national capacity, the instruments of war were frequently prepared against it. 'Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation,' said their inveterate enemies. Psal. cxxxvii. 7.

Under the new testament, when the church of God is more select, the enemy has attempted to destroy it by persecution and temptation. There are also the fiery darts of the devil, which are aimed at individuals. Such are those thoughts of presumption and despair, against which we need the whole armour of God to defend us. Ephes. vi. 16.

2. It is implied, that *many tongues would rise up against them*. They have been accused and slandered many ways, because they obey God, rather than man. They have often been accused as enemies to civil government, when their enemies had any malignant purpose to accomplish by it: and because they hope to be saved by grace alone, they are represented as unfriendly to good works. Because of their sobriety, zeal, and self-denial, they are considered as being righteous overmuch; and are from hence frequently denominated enthusiasts and hypocrites.

3. It is promised that the Lord will preserve them, and bring them off *victorious at last* over both. No weapon shall prevail against them, and every accusing tongue they shall utterly condemn. This promise does not indeed always secure their liberty or their lives: but they shall conquer when they fall and die. They shall overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony. They are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved them: and in the day of judgment they shall be still more triumphant.

III. The ground on which these blessings are bestowed: "It is of me," saith the Lord.

It is all of grace; and this is intimated by two expressions—

1. Their portion is called *a heritage*. It is not the wages of their labour, or that which necessarily arises out of it, but a free gift.
2. Their *righteousness* also is "of the Lord." None but holy men are saved, yet none are saved on account of their holiness. This is the great lesson to be learned: 'When ye have done all, say that ye are unprofitable servants.' Luke xvii. 10.

If such be the commendation of the Lord's service, what is the heritage of the servants of Satan? There are weapons formed against you and they will prevail. Tongues will rise up to condemn, and you will not be able to stand in the day of judgment.

MYSTERIES OF DIVINE GOVERNMENT.

✓ *Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.—Psalm xcvi. 2.*

This psalm is a prophecy of the Messiah's kingdom, which is under the government of his word, and of his wise and holy providence. All men are his subjects by right, but not in fact, as multitudes reject his authority.

But as he is made head over all things for the church, and it is promised, that unto him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord; the whole world is placed under his dominion, and all nations must serve him.

The text speaks more immediately of the providential government of Christ; and it teaches us, that though there is in his proceedings a great deal that is mysterious, yet that all is accompanied by righteousness and judgment.

I. Notice a little the mysteries of the divine government: "Clouds and darkness are round about him."

In various instances, God's government of the world appears very *different from what it really is*. Events which on the whole are pregnant with the best blessings, often wear a lowering aspect. There

was much darkness and mystery in what befel Jacob's family.

The death of Christ was an inscrutable event to his disciples.

The various persecutions of the church have been the same, and the convulsions which have attended the nations of the earth. Many of these things cannot be penetrated at the time they happen; but afterwards it is often seen that they are different from what they appear to be, and have a very different result.

2. Many of the great designs of providence *are executed by men*, who mean the opposite of what actually comes to pass; and as we are more acquainted with human intentions than with those of the divine mind, we are full of apprehensions, and often find ourselves happily disappointed.

Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, in carrying Israel into captivity, intended to destroy them utterly; but God meant it for good, and to cleanse them from their idols. Isai. x. 6, 7.

Haman, in his administration of the Persian government, intended the overthrow of the Jews in all the provinces; but God meant it for their welfare, and to give honour to his servant Mordecai.

The same may be said of Pharaoh towards Israel in Egypt.

In all these instances, where the intentions of the divine government are effected by the agency of man, and through the medium of some of the worst of the human passions, there is a great and impenetrable mystery.

3. The administration of Christ's kingdom has *different ends to accomplish* towards different descriptions of men. The same events therefore are productive of different effects, and this gives an air of mystery to the system of providence.

That which was a cloud of thick

darkness to the Egyptians, was a pillar of fire to the Israelites; and what proved the destruction of one, was the salvation of the other.

4. There is also a comprehension and a magnitude in the movements of Christ's kingdom, which *far exceed our conceptions*. His

plan embraces objects at an immense distance, and which are brought to pass by an infinite series of events, running through several successive ages of time.

Here is Antichrist to continue for a thousand two hundred and threescore years, till its days are numbered and finished: such events are like the circuit of a comet, passing through immeasurable space.

Things of so large a compass, embracing such a multiplicity of objects, must need appear very mysterious; and when we gaze upon them, we see that clouds and darkness are round about the throne of the Eternal. Psal. xcii. 5.

II. Notwithstanding the mystery attending the divine government, it is nevertheless founded in the strictest justice and equity.

1. There is a judgment which awaits *particular nations*; but this will eventually appear to be conducted in a way of perfect righteousness. While God was carrying on his designs towards Israel, in the times of the prophets, messages were sent to all the surrounding nations, intimating what would be their doom, and how he would enter into judgment with them; so that when their destruction came, they might see the rod, and him that had appointed it.

Many have had their times of reckoning; as Babylon and Tyre, and all the great powers of old; and such must be the case with us.

Whatever injustice be found in men towards one another, whatever oppression or cruelty they may exercise, God will bring it to account; and it shall be seen that justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

2. Judgment is pronounced on *mystical Babylon*, which will come sooner or later; and it is such as will effect all her adherents.

Hence that warning is given: 'Come out of her, my people, that ye partake not of her plagues.' But this also will proceed in a way of just and righteous retribution. Rev. xix. 1, 2.

3. Justice and judgment also await *the church of God*; for in it there are many things that offend, and them that do iniquity.

The Lord will eventually clear up the mysteries of his providence, and he that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness. 1 Pet. iv. 17. Psal. l. 4.

This speaks joy to the friends of God, and terror to all his enemies. Psal. xcvi. 1. xcix. 1.

CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT.

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.—
Philippians iv. 11.

This was the declaration of a great man of God: and it will be happy for us to aspire after his example. The Philippians had been very kind to him, in ministering often to his necessities, and he took it well at their hands: yet he wished them to know that he made no great account of the good things of this life, but could do without them.

It is not the language of boasting, however, of his own strength; no, he was indebted to Christ for all: ver. 13. This is a lesson which but few have learned, but which is of great importance for us to study daily.

1. Explain the nature of Christian Contentment, and wherein it consists.

It does not consist in insensibility or indifference, as to our situation in the present life. Paul himself felt the hardships to which he was subject, and prayed to be delivered from them. He was keenly sensible of 'the thorn in the flesh,' and besought the Lord that it might depart from him. He also felt the injuries of men towards him, and prayed to be delivered out of the hands of the wicked and unreasonable. But he considered his lot in life as the will of God; and deeming that alone to be sufficient, he was quite content.

More particularly—

1. To be content is to be *satisfied with our station in life*, without envying those who are above us, or in superior circumstances.

Men in general are seeking great things for themselves, and make it their leading object to ascend up into the higher stations of society: but christian contentment is satisfied with its lot. The former description of persons are always looking at those above them, and feel envy; while the latter look at those below them, and feel thankful.

The former is a sort of ambition which no means can gratify.

2. It is to be satisfied *in all the vicissitudes which may attend us in our station*. If prosperous, we shall be thankful: if adverse, we shall consider that the hand of the Lord is in it. There is much self-deception in supposing that we should be content in another situation, if wholly discontent in that which we already occupy; though nothing is more common than for persons to imagine, that if they were only in such and such circumstances, then they should be happy—but it is all a delusion.

Paul says, "In whatsoever state *I am*;" and the exhortation is, Be content with such as "ye have;" not with what ye might be, or might have. It may be that we are poor, afflicted, oppressed: and can these things be agreeable? No, not in themselves: but viewed as the cup which our Father has given us to drink, and considering the

whole of our lot as of divine appointment, we may feel content, let it be whatever it may. This spirit too will humble us under the calamities which may befall the nation or the world; knowing that there is no evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it. Amos iii. 6. 1 Thess. iii. 3.

3. It is made up of *resignation, humility and thankfulness*. The language of true contentment is, 'Thou Lord shalt choose our inheritance—I will bear the indignation of the Lord—If he say, I have no delight in thee, here I am—The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him.'—

II. Notice the eminent example of contentment afforded us in the life of Paul.

Much of the meaning and force of language depends on the character and situation of the speaker. If Paul had been in high life, in a state of affluence and ease, his words would have no force. But he was not: and what is more, his poverty and affliction were the effect of his religion, and his love to Christ. He might have been otherwise, but he counted all things but loss for him. Many persons, circumstanced as Paul was, would have felt more keenly than he did.

The situations through which he had to pass were of no ordinary description, as may be seen by the enumeration given us in 2 Cor. vi. 4—10, and xi. 23—27. Are we poor? so was he. Are we destitute and hungry? so was he. Are we afflicted and oppressed? so was he. And yet his language is, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

III. The way in which he attained this desirable state of mind: "I have learned."—

It was not natural to him; but he received it, he "learned" it. And where did he learn it? Not at the feet of Gamaliel, nor while a pharisee; but in the school of Christ, and at the foot of the cross.

1. He learned it from *the precepts of God's word*. He understood that it was God's right to govern, and ours to obey: that every thought is to be brought into subjection to him. This lesson also David learned, and taught to others. Psal. xxxvii. 1—7.

2. He learned it from *the principles of the gospel*, and so learned it as to make it his own. He learned it especially from the doctrine of the cross, by which he was crucified to the world, and the world to him. Gal. vi. 14.

3. From *the example of Christ himself*. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor—The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it—He was meek and lowly in heart: a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. This was Paul's pattern, and he copied after it.

(1) It glorifies God and the gospel, to trust all in his hands, and to rely on its faithfulness and truth. The contrary disposition tends to dishonour both.

(2) How much does this spirit of contentment promote our own happiness, and the happiness of others. What a blessed world would this be, if such a spirit universally prevailed.

(3) It has the promise of God's presence: 'Be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' Heb. xiii. 5.

CHRIST'S AGONY IN THE GARDEN.

My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.—Matthew xxvi. 38.

The sufferings of Christ contain one of the great mysteries of godliness. It is a subject of which we know but little, and cannot fully comprehend; but it would be happy for us if we were better acquainted with it. It was Paul's prayer, that he might know the fellowship of his sufferings, and be made conformable unto his death.

The manner in which our Lord spent the last night, the night before his suffering, is highly impressive. He went with his disciples to the house of a friend in Jerusalem; and when evening was come, they entered an upper room to eat the passover; after which, the supper of the Lord was instituted. Judas left the room, and had an interview with the Jews, according to a previous appointment. When he was gone, Jesus delivered his farewell discourse to his disciples, which is given in the 14th to the 17th chapter of John. At the close of this affecting address, Jesus offered up his intercessory prayer, in the hearing of his disciples. Taking with him his confidential friends, Peter, James, and John, he entered into the garden of Gethsemane; and here he began to be "very heavy, and sore amazed." The disciples who were with him beheld his agony, and heard the distressing words recorded in our text. Let us,

1. Attentively consider the fact: "His soul was exceeding sorrowful."

It was so indeed, and to such a degree as exceeded all his former sufferings. Christ's own testimony is sufficient to prove this: he never affected grief, nor magnified his sufferings. Men are apt indeed to represent their afflictions as greater than they are, and to complain too much; but it was not so with our blessed Lord. Great sorrows generally prevent loud complaints, and are like deep waters, which run the stillest. It was thus with Job, and also with Jesus. He made no great complaint: a few words to his friends, and a few to his heavenly Father, are all that dropped from his lips. Isai. liii. 7. 1 Pet. ii. 23.

Nearly all the evangelists have given an account of his sufferings in the garden, which they describe in various affecting forms of speech. Mark tells us that he begins to be "sore amazed:" ch. xiv. 33.

Luke, that he was "in an agony, sweating as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground." Matthew tells us that he was "exceeding sorrowful even unto death." What a scene was this?

Sorrow is the fruit of sin; but here was no sin, though he was treated as if he had been the chief of sinners, yea the only sinner in the world; as if divine vengeance had forgotten to run in its usual channels, it concentrated all in him. Blessed Saviour! Why art thou cast down, and why is thy soul disquieted within thee? Considering the infinite dignity of his person, and how much he was the object of the Father's delight; the scene is full of awful grandeur, and such as was never before exhibited.

II. Endeavour to account for it.

If Christ died merely as a martyr, as some have pretended, the overwhelming nature of his sufferings could not be accounted for. On this scheme, he would appear very inferior to many of his followers, who have suffered death for his sake with heroic fortitude.

Some indeed who deny the deity and atonement of Christ, have endeavoured to remove the difficulty, by allowing that Christ is not only a mere man, but a very imperfect one, and bring this transaction in the garden as an instance of his timidity and want of resolution! Thus has the Saviour of the world been degraded by his followers, and betrayed by his professed friends.

Our blessed Lord challenged the Jews, saying, 'which of you convinceth me of sin?' But it seems as if some of his pretended followers would accept the challenge, which even his enemies declined. Let us dread dishonouring the Saviour, by attempting to account for his agony in such a way as this.

In general, we may observe, it was now that the Father *withdrew himself* from his beloved Son: and what that would be to him, who can tell? 'My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me!'

It was now also that he poured out *his wrath* to the uttermost upon him.

As he had become the sinner's Surety, he must feel the weight of that curse which the sinner had deserved: and who knoweth the power of thine anger!

Who can estimate the tremendous evil and demerit of sin? Even Jesus himself was "sore amazed."

Now it was that the *prince of this world* came to make his last desperate attack upon him: this was the hour and the power of darkness.

The enemy had before tried what he could do by temptation; and now he will try what the most awful terrors may accomplish. John xiv. 30. All these things meeting together, his soul became "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."

More particularly—

1. The *greatness of his mind* rendered him more susceptible of grief than we can possibly experience or imagine.

As man, his intimate union with the divine nature, gave an enlargement to his powers beyond our highest conceptions.

It was no small part of Job's affliction that he was to be set at nought by persons so inferior to himself, and towards whom it would have been an act of condescension to have noticed them in any other circumstances.

2. His *infinite purity* freed him from all partiality. He therefore saw things as they were, and had a full view of the infinite evil of sin, as it affected the righteous government of God; and this would render him susceptible of the greatness of his displeasure against it.

It is this which gives an edge to punishment: if God's displeasure against sin had been arbitrary, or severe beyond measure, even hell itself would be tolerable, and Christ would not have felt what he did.

We can bear contempt or suffering much better when we know they are undeserved, than when it is otherwise. All that Christ felt, he knew to be the just desert of sin; and this it was that gave poignancy to his sufferings.

3. His *love to the Father* was such that it must necessarily have affected him in an unknown degree, to be forsaken and put to grief by him. Isai. liii. 10. The frowns of any one may be endured, excepting those of a friend: oh why hast "*thou forsaken me!*"

4. The love he bore *to the souls of men*, made their conduct towards him exceeding grievous. Had it been an enemy that should crucify and put him to open shame, he could have borne it: but he was wounded in the house of his friends, he was put to death by those whose life he came to seek.

When Satan came against him, it did not grieve him, but raised his abhorrence: but the prospect of suffering by the hands of men, filled him with bitterness of soul. Heb. v. 7.

III. Improvement.

1. What a motive is here for *gratitude*, when we consider the results of this dismal hour. From hence it is that the curse is removed, and that the sorrows of the believer have nothing penal in them. Since he has drunk the bitter cup, there is nothing left for us: the means is now prepared for turning our sorrows into endless joys, and our tears into rivers of delight. John xvi. 20. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

2. What a motive for *repentance*, to think of the sorrows which he endured. What has sin done: how evil in its nature and how bitter in its consequences.

3. Let the example of the suffering Saviour teach us *sympathy* towards the afflicted. He bore our sorrows, and carried our griefs: in all our afflictions he himself was afflicted. Let us learn to bear each other's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Isai. lxiii. 9. liii. 4. Gal. vi. 2.

4. Let us also learn *patience* from his example, and consider him who endured the cross for us, lest we be weary and faint in our minds. Heb. xii. 2, 3. 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

5. From his sufferings we may learn what will be the portion of the finally *impenitent*, who reject his salvation. Their sorrows will be insupportable, and unavailing. Matt. xiii. 42.

THE BLESSED AND THE CURSED.

Thus saith the Lord, Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh; but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.—Jeremiah xvii. 5—8.

This passage is like the cloudy pillar in the wilderness: it has a dark side and a bright one. It contains both the blessing and the curse, and it behoves us to consider it well.

I. Observe the great point on which the curse or the blessing turns; that is, whether we trust in man, or in the name of the Lord.

The text may have especial reference to the situation of Judah at that time. Being threatened with invasion, they trusted in Egypt as a rival power of Babylon, or in their own strength; particularly in their artificial fortifications, which they had raised about Jerusalem. Psal. xlviii. 12, 13. Or they might trust in their individual accomplishments, as wise, and rich and powerful. Jer. ix. 23.

This also may apply to us as a nation. Like Judah, we form alliances, and raise armies and navies, and it may be right to do so; but wo unto us, if we trust in them, so that our heart departeth from the Lord.

There is likewise a great proneness in us to trust in individual accomplishments; in our wisdom, strength, and riches; though it is equally foolish and dangerous. Prov. xviii. 11.

It is however a matter of great consequence where we place our confidence, even in reference to the present life; still more so for the life to come. Here every degree of confidence in man is a departure from the Lord.

More particularly—

1. As we trust *the wisdom of man*, on the one hand, or *the revelation of God* on the other, we are under the curse or the blessing. God, in having given us a revelation of his will, has told us in effect that all our wisdom is nought, and will never guide us to heaven. God has presented himself as our guide, and it is for us to resign up ourselves to him: and here it is that the godly and ungodly are distinguished. Some indeed avowedly reject the Scriptures: others admit in general their authority, yet no farther than in what agrees with their own wisdom, or than what their reason can comprehend. The christian on the contrary feels his ignorance, and says, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel:' what thou teachest, I receive: what thou commandest, I obey.

On this point turns the blessing or the curse.

2. As to righteousness, as well as wisdom, the great enquiry is whether we trust in *the righteousness of man* on the one hand, or in *the righteousness of Christ* on the other.

God, in sending his Son to obey, to suffer, and to die in our stead, has told us the way in which we must be accepted and saved, and directed us to trust in him. Isai. xxviii. 16.

Here again the godly and the ungodly are divided, and by this are they distinguished.

One says, in all his approaches to the throne of grace, 'God be merciful to me a sinner;' while the other derives his satisfaction from something within himself. The one admits with Paul, that God hath saved and called us by his grace; but the other cannot understand the saying: such were the unbelieving Jews of old. 2 Tim. i. 9. Rom. ix. 32.

Of such self-righteous characters as these the world is full. One trusts in ceremonies: another thinks, if he be just and sober, and does what he can, he shall do well.

Many also who hear the gospel, are as far from trusting in Christ as others are: they are as good as they can be, they think, and trust in their devotions, and their prayers.

They look inward for comfort, rather than to Christ; while others, who make a profession of religion, are for trusting in that profession.

Those who trust in themselves, not only make a Saviour of their own righteousness, but deceive themselves also with respect to what is righteousness: some we read of, 'trusted in themselves that they were righteous,' when indeed they were not. Luke xviii. 9.

3. Though we *trust in the Saviour himself*, yet if we consider him *only as a man*, we cannot stand clear of the awful curse denounced in our text.

If he be only a man, to trust in him is to trust in "an arm of flesh;" and in doing so, our hearts depart from the Lord.

Those who truly trust in the Lord Jesus, have respect to his divine character, his divine nature; and it is this which renders his blood and righteousness efficacious. 1 Tim. i. 12. 1 John i. 9.

If his divinity be left out, there is no ground of trust, but in an arm of flesh, and in our own good works.

II. Consider the different issues of these things; a blessing or a curse, and that from the Lord himself.

1. Observe to what *the accursed are compared*: "a heath in the desert, that shall not see when good cometh."

When the showers of heaven fall upon the pastures, they revive and bring forth: they "see when good cometh."

But come what will, the other gets no good; but remains barren, amidst all the blessings diffused around.

There are times when good comes to the church and people of God; but the self-righteous and self-confident are like the unbelieving lord. 2 Kings vii. 18—20.

What was all the good which God did to Israel, to the world around them, or even to the unbelieving in the midst of them. What was the coming of Christ to the Jews, or the coming of his kingdom to that unbelieving people.

Good sometimes comes to a particular congregation, and the dews of

heaven descend upon it: but they are like the heath in the desert.

Good comes to individual christians, under all the ills of life: but there is none to the unbeliever. When Christ comes to judgment also, grace will be brought to his people: but those who trust in an arm of flesh shall never see good.

2. Notice to what *the blessed are compared*: “trees planted by the rivers of water.”

It is supposed that as good comes to those who trust in the Lord, so in the present world evil may come also; but amidst all their troubles they shall have a source of consolation, and shall still be rendered fat and flourishing. Psal. xcii. 13—15.

It is therefore of unspeakable importance, that we build our hopes on a right foundation.

PRACTICAL TENDENCY OF TRUE WISDOM.

- *The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.*—Proverbs xiv. 8.

The wisdom of the merely learned may be applied to the purposes of amusement; but that of the prudent has a higher end. There is, it is true, a great difference between the wisdom of some worldly men, and that of others. Some deal in mere speculation, which is of no use to themselves, or to mankind; while others of a more prudent turn, direct their talents to useful purposes. This is very observable in the conduct of some very learned and sensible men, in the different departments of science; and thus it is that the wisdom of some men does them no good, while that of others is rendered advantageous.

Solomon however seldom writes of mere natural wisdom: that which he has in view originates in the fear of the Lord, and is that holy wisdom which is distinguished from the wisdom of this world. Its characteristic is, that it is of a “prudent” nature, and directed to the “understanding of our way,” as a matter of the highest importance. Hence it is properly contrasted with the last clause of the verse: “the folly of fools is deceit.” They deceive their own souls, and all their wisdom is no better than folly.

- I. Illustrate the nature of that wisdom which is here ascribed to the prudent.

It is implied that there is what is called wisdom, which is of a different tendency; wisdom without prudence—

1. The wisdom of some men is to *understand things which cannot be understood*. When David said, that he did “not exercise himself in great matters, or in things too high for him,” it is implied that there were those who did; and there are some of this description still. Man should know that there are things too high for him; and if we per-

plex ourselves with abstruse and abstract questions, we may soon be lost. Were we to inquire, what is spirit—what is eternity—what is immensity—how came sin to enter into the world—why did God create man, when he knew the part he would act; and were we to urge many other similar enquiries—it would not lead us one step in our way to heaven.

All these questions belong to the wisdom of the imprudent.

2. The wisdom of some others is to *pry into things, which if understood, would be of very little use.*

This indeed is the case with the greater part of the wisdom of this world.

The knowledge of arts and sciences is all very well; but if an improvement in these things be attended with the neglect of our way to heaven, it becomes of no use to us: and this too often is the case. A man would justly be blamed, if he cultivated an acquaintance with any of the branches of learning, while he neglected the interests of his family. How much more, when men are all intent on these things to the neglect of their souls.

3. The wisdom of some men consists in understanding *the way of others*, but that of the prudent in understanding *his own way.*

The wisdom of some is wholly employed in censuring the conduct of those about them; in observing the way of the world in general, and of the nations upon earth, and of all men's ways but their own. The wisdom of the prudent, though it does not wholly overlook these things, operates in a different direction.

II. Enquire what there is pertaining to our way which true wisdom will lead us to understand.

1. It will lead us above all things to see that *our way be right.*

There are many bye ways, and many walking in them: true wisdom will not rest till we have found the path of life.

Thus it wrought in those who were awakened under Peter's sermon: and thus in the Philippian jailor.

It will lead us to ponder the path of our feet; to know in whom we have trusted, and with whom we have cast in our lot.

To see not only that we are right in the main, but right in all respects, especially that our hearts are right with God: this is true wisdom.

Mere worldly prudence would incline us to examine whether our way be advantageous, and likely to succeed; but wisdom will lead us to see that it be right.

2. It will incline us diligently to attend to *the directions of the way.*

It will lead us to search the Scriptures; the doctrines for belief, and the precepts for practice; to follow no other guide, no other rule; but to take the word of God as a light unto our feet, and a lamp to our paths. 2 Pet. i. 19.

3. True wisdom will teach us to *guard against the dangers of the way*; to beware of the numerous temptations to turn aside; to notice the evils to which our age, our circumstances in life, and our propensities may more immediately expose us, and carefully to watch against them. To know the depths of Satan, and to guard against falling into them.

4. It will especially direct us to keep our eye upon *the end of our way.*

A truly wise man always looks at this, while a foolish man goes that way which has most company, or is most followed, and

where he can go most at his ease. But where will it end? To know the end of every false way will deter us from walking in it: to know the end of the right way will induce us to pursue it.

Christ himself kept sight of the joy that was set before him, and for this he endured the cross. If we would run with patience the race that is set before us, we must do the same.

Let it be our great concern to obtain and to cultivate this wisdom by reading, by meditation, by prayer. Prov. ii. 1—5.

HAPPY ISSUE OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION.

Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.—Psalm xcvi. 11.

The mode of expression used in this passage is common in Hebrew poetry, which consists of a double sentence, the latter part of which is illustrative of the former. "Light" is here put for gladness, and "righteous" for the "upright in heart." The whole is designed to teach us, that the most upright of men must expect a portion of darkness and sorrow for the present; but that it shall sooner or later come to a happy issue. All our enjoyments arise from contrast: if there were no darkness and sorrow here, light and gladness would not be what it will be hereafter.

I. Notice a few of those sorrows which attend the godly in the present state, and observe their happy issue.

There is abundant reason to expect a portion of darkness and sorrow in this life, because—

1. If we now sustain the character of "the righteous and the upright in heart," yet this was *not always the case with us*; and much of our present darkness and sorrow may be the bitter fruit of former sins.

Though God may have forgiven us, yet he may also continue to take vengeance on our inventions: personal and relative troubles may be the consequence. Psal. xcix. 8. Manasseh must walk in darkness and sorrow, and seeing the fruits of his sin all his days.

Yet if found "righteous" before God, we shall be forgiven, and all this darkness shall be turned into light. God may chasten us here, but it will only be for a time: he will hide his face, but it will only be for a little moment, and the indignation shall be overpast. He will wipe away all tears from the faces of his people, and sorrow and sighing shall be heard no more. Psal. xxx. 5. Isai. xii. 1. liv. 7, 8. lvii. 16—19. Rev. vii. 17. xxi. 4.

2. Though "upright" on the whole, yet there have been *deviations in our conduct* since we were made "righteous," and many backslidings from God: and our present darkness and sorrow may be the fruit of these.

David had much of this in his latter days: the sword

departed not from his house : and it may be so with us. Many eminent characters have at different times been driven aside into temptation, or some unexpected evil, which has darkened their sky, and eclipsed both their evidences and their comforts. Some easily besetting sin indulged, or some created good idolised, will eat up all our religion, and bring sorrow and darkness with it.

But if we be truly "righteous," things will come to a happy issue at last.

3. Irrespective of particular sins, it pleases God in the present state to *humble and try us* by various dark dispensations of providence. Israel were to have the good land, but they must go through the wilderness to possess it. This was a dark passage, but the Lord led them about, that he might try them, and know what was in their hearts. Deut. viii. 3.

God sometimes brings his people into *dark and trying circumstances*, into situations from whence they can see no way of escape.

This was the case with Job : yet the Lord lighted his lamp at last, even in this world. Job xlii. 12. James v. 11.

Thus also with Judah in her captivity, Lam. iii. 5—9 : yet the cloud was dissipated at last : and there are many such seasons in our life, if we did but keep a register of God's mercies.

Sometimes the Lord brings upon us a load of *relative grief and trouble*, such as we cannot unbind or get rid of.

Unhappy connections, disobedient children, become a source of overwhelming distress. Thus Jacob's grey hairs were brought with sorrow to the grave : at least the latter part of his life was greatly embittered by this means.

Unhappy connections in religion, union without fellowship in the Spirit, attended with discord and evil surmisings, are likewise productive of similar effects.

But if we are truly "upright," all these things will end well at last.

4. A large portion of sorrow and darkness that a good man endures in this life, *arises from what he has within him*, and continually carries about with him ; even a body of sin and death, which makes him truly wretched. Hence we are often in the dark in secret duties, in reading, and hearing the word.

But if upright, all this shall be removed. God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly : faith shall be finally victorious : we must therefore hope to the end, for the grace that shall be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Pet. i. 13.

Much darkness and sorrow also attend *the church of God*, collectively, as well as individual believers.

Israel was long in Egypt, but the Lord brought them out at last with a high hand : in Babylon also, but the day of their redemption came.

The church has often been in persecution, but God has confounded all them that rose up against it. So now, Christ will one day gather out of his kingdom all things that offend. Matt. xiii. 41—43.

II. Consider the ground of our hope for such an issue.

"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart : " and therefore, sooner or later, it shall spring up.

1. It is sown in the *gracious purposes* of Heaven. God has 'prepared' things which ye have not seen, for them that love him: goodness is 'laid up' for them that fear him, and trust in him before the sons of men. Psal. xxxi. 19. 1 Cor. ii. 9. Col. i. 5.

2. It is sown for us in the *mediation of Christ*. All his sorrows are the seeds of joy to us: this is the procuring cause of all our comforts, both here and hereafter. All that he has done and suffered on earth, and all that he is now doing in heaven, will issue in the joy of his people: and what a harvest of light and gladness will arise! Psal. lxxii. 16.

3. In the *promises of God*. The seed is sown, the word is gone out of his lips, and shall not return pardon, preservation, and eternal life. Isai. lv. 11, 12.

4. In the *tears of godly sorrow*. Christ's sorrows were the seeds of merit, these of meetness; but each will have their fruit. Godly sorrow generally issues in hope and joy, even in this world, and shall end in everlasting life. Psal. cxxvi. 5, 6. Gal. vi. 8.

5. The very *troubles and trials themselves*, under which the righteous groan, being burdened, are the seeds of future joy, and shall work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

(1) Let us then be reconciled to affliction, and patiently wait for the light and gladness that will soon arise. Psal. xxx. 5.

(2) Under all our trials, let us be chiefly concerned to be "upright in heart," and all will issue well. Psal. xlix. 14.

(3) Wo to the unbeliever: darkness and sorrow are sown for him, and he himself is continually sowing the seeds of eternal misery! Prov. i. 30, 31.

THE LEPER.

Behold there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.—Matthew viii. 2.

Our Lord having finished his celebrated sermon on the mount, was followed by a multitude of people, who were astonished at his doctrine: and when he had descended into the plain, he was accosted by an afflicted individual, whose conduct claims our present attention.

I. Notice the particulars of his case, and the instruction it is calculated to afford.

1. The applicant was "a leper." Another evangelist describes him as extremely afflicted, and 'full of the leprosy.' Luke v. 12. This dreadful disease was found to be incurable, except by miracle, and was the great scourge of the Jewish nation. The unhappy subjects of it

were excluded from society, to prevent infection, and passed their lives in hopeless misery and wretchedness.

The peculiar loathsomeness of this disease renders it a fit emblem of that moral pollution and defilement which has infected the nature of man, and to this also it is frequently compared. Isai. i. 6. Like the leper, the sinner is shut out from the camp: he can have no fellowship with God, or with his people.

Here as in the other case, the hand of the Lord only can effect a cure.

2. The leper "came to Christ, and worshipped him." He had heard of the fame of Jesus; had probably heard the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, and felt convinced that his mission was divine. Awed by his presence, he prostrated himself before him and offered humble adoration. Christ is not only the medium of worship, through which we have access unto the Father, but the immediate object of it. Josh. v. 14. Luke xxiv. 52. Acts vii. 59. All men are commanded to honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. Psal. xlv. 11. John v. 23.

3. The faith and confidence expressed in the leper's prayer: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He believed him to be the Lord, and attributes to him the supreme dominion: not doubting but diseases were under his controul, and that life and death depended on his sovereign will. He did not come like the weeping father in another case, saying, 'If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us:' but full of faith and hope, his unhesitating language is, 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.' In this manner, sinners of every description are directed to come to Christ; faith in him being essential to our acceptance, and to the success of all our supplications. Mark ix. 23.

II. Consider the case of the leper as in some respects applicable to ourselves.

Miserable as he was, and desperate as his condition appeared, he had no doubt in the ability of Christ to heal and to save: and though he might also have no doubt of his abundant grace and mercy towards others, he seems not wholly free from apprehensions, as to the success of his own immediate application. "Lord, if thou *wilt*, thou canst make me clean;" but here it was that the doubt rested.

Similar to this is the case of an awakened sinner, in his first application to Christ for mercy. He cannot doubt his inability to save, and to save to the uttermost; he cannot doubt but that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin; that his grace is sufficient to renew and sanctify the most corrupted and depraved heart. Yet of his readiness to hear *his* prayer, and to save *him*, he thinks he may be allowed to doubt, and that in this case it would almost be presumption to believe.

1. The awakened sinner is aware, that though Christ is able to save the very chief of sinners, and to pardon all sin without exception; yet that he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and saves, not according to the extent of his ability, but according to the sovereignty of

his own will.

Hence arises one of the principal difficulties.

Yet in reality, this need not be any hindrance in the way of a sinner's return to God, nor occasion any hesitation about his acceptance through a Mediator. The invitations of the gospel are indefinite and universal, and the promises are sure to all them that believe. Christ not only can, but assuredly will make the leper clean. Matt. xi. 28. John vi. 37. vii. 37. Rev. xxii. 17.

2. A sense of the infinite purity and justice of God fills the sinner with alarming apprehensions, while pleading for mercy at his hands, and causes him to fear that his application may be in vain. Even holy men have been made to loathe themselves, and to sink almost into despair, when they have had a more than ordinary view of the unsullied purity of the divine nature. Job xlii. 5, 6. Isai. vi. 5. No wonder therefore, that the awakened sinner fears and trembles in his first approaches to the mercy seat.

The children of Israel, when they heard the voice of the Lawgiver, were ready to die. Exod. xx. 19. The Centurion was so affected with a sense of Christ's infinite purity, that he could scarcely think of receiving him under his roof; and Peter also on one occasion was overwhelmed with the displays of this perfection. Matt. viii. 8. Luke v. 8. How then is the miserable leper to draw nigh, and his terrors not make him afraid?

3. A sense of his own vileness and utter unworthiness, adds still more to his discouragement, and to the difficulty of believing that he shall obtain mercy. It is easy indeed to believe in Christ's al sufficiency, and also that others have obtained mercy; but when the penitent reflects on the enormity of his own offences, and the peculiar aggravations of his guilt; he can find no case parallel to his own, and no instances of mercy to warrant that confidence which he longs to exercise. The salvation of Christ is infinitely desirable, and the promises exceeding great and precious; but they all seem too great, too good for him. He therefore can only say, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

4. Former applications have perhaps been unsuccessful, and this also tends to produce discouragement. If the Lord does not answer prayer immediately, the sinner fears he will never answer it at all; and begins to think that his mercies are clean gone for evermore. So thought Asaph, and also the house of Israel, who imagined that they were doomed to perish in their sins. Psal. lxxvii. 8. Ezek. xxxiii. 10.

An awakened sinner, loaded with a sense of guilt, is apt to lie down under his burden, if not speedily relieved; or is tempted to try some other means of getting ease, instead of coming still to Christ as weary and heavy laden. The conduct of the woman of Canaan, and also of the church in captivity, affords a better example, and gives encouragement to humble and importunate prayer. Lam. iii. 40, 41. Matt. xv. 25—28.

5. It is one of Satan's temptations, when a sinner is coming to Christ for mercy, to lead him to doubt whether he shall obtain it. While in a state of unbelief, he represents God as all mercy; but when the sinner is brought to repentance, then he is altogether inexorable, and there is no forgiveness. When Hezekiah humbled himself, and was in bitter-

ness of soul, he was made to believe that God would ‘make an end of him;’ and when the lunatic was brought to Christ for healing, the foul spirit tare him, and sought to destroy him. Isai. xxxviii. 13. Mark ix. 20. Often does he suggest, It is true, Christ can make thee clean; but he will not; thou art too vile and sinful to be noticed by him. Still, in spite of every objection, we must take up the prayer of the leper, and wait at the Redeemer’s feet.

THE LEPER HEALED.

And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean: and immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man: but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.—Matthew viii. 3, 4.

While the miracles of Christ attested the divinity of his mission, they at the same time declared him to be the only-begotten of the Father, ‘full of grace and truth.’ They displayed not only an authority absolutely supreme, but a benignity that infinitely surpassed all that had ever been witnessed upon earth. The holy evangelist, while recording the successive miracles mentioned in this chapter, was so struck with this, that he represents the blessed Saviour as being laden with the miseries of a ruined world, even as he was afterwards to bear the load of human guilt: ver. 17.

View the different parts of our Lord’s conduct in healing the leper, now prostrate at his feet.

1. He “put forth his hand.” This was the usual form of benediction, adopted by the patriarchs and prophets. Gen. xlviii. 14. 2 Kings v. 11. It was also our Lord’s custom on other occasions, where a blessing was to be conferred. Mark vii. 32. The hand being the emblem of power, the stretching it out in the present instance indicated an intention of exerting that power on behalf of the sufferer, who now implored his aid. Acts iv. 30.

2. He “touched him.” Miraculous cures were sometimes effected by the party being permitted to touch the Saviour. Matt. ix. 20. xiv. 36. More frequently by Jesus himself condescending to touch the afflicted. Matt. ix. 29. Mark vii. 33. In the present instance it expresses more than ordinary condescension, the leper being legally unclean, and odious in the sight of men. In the case of the Centurion’s servant, the cure was wrought at a distance, without coming in contact with the party, to show that Christ was every where present, and that diseases come and go at his command: ver. 13.

3. Jesus said to him, “I will, be thou clean.” This is language that

could not fit the lips of any created being: for what could supreme authority say more? The miracle is wrought in his own name, by his own power, and according to the sovereignty of his own will. The leper had referred his case to the will of Christ, not doubting his ability to save; and now he hears a mandate which sickness and disease should instantly obey.

4. The effect which followed: "and immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

(1) The cure was instantaneous. No sooner was the blessing asked, but it was granted. The Lord sometimes delays to answer prayer, but it is only when his glory and our good may best be promoted by it. The present case was urgent, and the faith of the party strong: the Lord therefore deals with him according to his faith. John iv. 49, 50.

(2) It was done freely, and without reluctance. A favour may be quickly and gratuitously conferred, which yet is not done with cheerfulness. But here it was the work of love, of sympathy, and the tenderest compassion. Mark i. 41. Such indeed is the general character of our Lord's miracles, Matt. xiv. 14: and of the richer blessings of his salvation. Isai. lxiii. 9. 1 John iv. 10.

(3) The cure was perfect and complete, and fully equal to the wants and wishes of the suppliant. He was healed at once, both in body and in soul; was cleansed from his leprosy, and also from his sins. Psal. ciii. 2, 3.

5. Christ having healed the leper, charged him, as in some other instances, that the miracle should not be known. "See thou tell no man." The cure itself could not be concealed, but the means by which it was effected might, and this is what our Lord required. (1)

To avoid all ostentation. He did not want his miracles to be blazed abroad: he never courted popularity, nor attempted to gather a multitude around him. He was followed and thronged whithersoever he went; but he himself sought retirement, and frequently withdrew from public notice. Mark ii. 1. vii. 24. Humility and meekness were the distinguishing qualities of his character, Matt. xi. 29. Phil. ii. 5: and these were clearly foretold in holy writ. Isai. xlii. 2, 3.

(2) Because he wished that his works should testify of him: and then he would not need any other witness. John v. 34, 36. His own worth and excellency are a sufficient commendation; and he no more wants a herald to proclaim his fame, than the sun a messenger to tell the world that he is risen.

6. Though our Lord prohibited the publication of the miracle, he sent the leper to the high priest.

(1) Because it was his office to determine upon every case of the leprosy, before the party could be received into the congregation of the Lord. Lev. xiii. 3. Hence also the necessity of preventing the publicity of the miracle, lest the priests, who were Christ's bitterest enemies, should affect to deny the cure.

(2) That the priests themselves might be left without excuse, if they still denied him to be the Christ, after witnessing the effect of such a miracle.

(3) The admission of the restored leper into the temple, to offer the gift required by the law of Moses, would be a still higher confirmation of the miracle; and should they still continue in unbelief, the transaction would remain as a lasting testimony against them.

(1) In all this we see much of the wisdom of Christ, with regard to his enemies, mixed with the tenderest compassion towards the afflicted and distressed. Isai. lii. 13.

(2) We see there is no reason for despair, in any who are mourning over their spiritual diseases; let them rather come to Christ, in the hope and confidence of being healed. Psal. xli. 4. Hos. xiv. 4. Mark ii. 17.

(3) Let those whom the great Physician has healed and sanctified, be concerned to make a suitable return for such abundant mercy, by giving themselves up to the service and glory of God.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AN OBJECT OF PRAYER AND OF HOPE.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.—Hebrews xiii. 20, 21.

The believing Hebrews were in a very unsettled state: many of them had gone back, and others were hesitating. Hence there were many practical disorders among them, and a general tendency to apostasy. Hence also the numerous warnings given them in various parts of this epistle: ch. ii. 3. iv. 1, 11. But after all this, the apostle closes his address with the prayer in the text, which is presented to God under the most endearing character.

This prayer is applicable to us as well as to them; for we also are the subjects of many defects, and need to offer up the same request.

I. Consider the blessings prayed for.

The apostle here gives us a picture of what christians should be, and should aspire after. Let us therefore pray—

1. That we may be “made perfect.” The word means to set right, to restore and put in order, as in Gal. vi. 1: it therefore applies to the disorders among the Hebrews and other christians. It does not so much express what we shall be hereafter, as what we may be in this world; and points out that lovely uniformity of character which accompanies great grace. If we examine ourselves, we shall find many things wanting, or so imperfect as to need much to be done for us, to make us what we should be. Some appear to be pious and devout, but are deficient in benevolence; they abound in the duties of the first table of the law, but are deficient in the second. Some have knowledge, but little zeal, and are cold hearted; while others abound in zeal, which is not according to knowledge.

Some are tender and affectionate, but wanting in courage and fidelity.

To abound in all the fruits of the Spirit, so as to exhibit a lovely uniformity of character, is to be "made perfect;" and this is unspeakably desirable.

2. Perfect "in every good work." If we be christians, we are engaged in many good works: such as preaching, praying, hearing, reading, acts of kindness towards men, and of charity to the poor.

But there is a manner of doing these things which gives a sort of perfection to the christian character: if our minds are set in order, they will all be done in the spirit of the gospel, and in a manner very different from what they would otherwise be.

There is such a thing as speaking the word 'as we ought to speak;' and of praying 'as we ought.' Ephes. vi. 20. Rom. viii. 26. xii. 8.

3. Perfect in every good work "to do his will." We may be much occupied in religious concerns, and yet not do the will of God in them.

Sometimes for want of taking his word as our rule: we may go a round of religious duties, because others do the same, without any reference to the will of God.

Sometimes the motive may be deficient: we may do many things from nothing but mere vanity, self-righteousness, or a desire to be seen of men.

But if we are 'made perfect,' we shall do the will of God from the heart.

4. We are taught to pray that the Holy Spirit may "work in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight."

It is not in our corrupt nature to attain these things, without the influence of the Holy Spirit: it is he that excites desire in prayer, resolution in labour, and that makes us perfect in every good word and work.

It is he that works faith in us by the promises, patience by sanctified affliction, and hope by the prospect of eternal life.

5. That all may be accepted "through Jesus Christ." None are accepted but as believing in him; and no works of ours, but for his sake.

II. The encouragement we have to pray for these blessings.

In offering up this prayer for the believing Hebrews, the apostle directed them and us to pray in the same manner, and from the same motives.

1. Great encouragement is derived from *the pacific character of God*, as "the God of peace." This view of the divine character is essential to our drawing near to him; and through a Mediator, there is now peace on earth, and good will towards men. It is now with the world as it was with mankind after the deluge, when God accepted the sacrifice of Noah. Gen. viii. 20, 21.

2. From *the proofs* of his being the God of peace; "having brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus." This is a doctrine of unspeakable importance, and supported by the clearest evidence.

(1) The resurrection of Christ is represented in the Scriptures as an act of almighty power, or as one of the greatest efforts of omnipotence. Ephes. i. 20.

(2) It is represented as a judicial release or dis-

charge. Rom. iv. 25. Simeon was kept as a hostage, having been surety for his brethren; but when they returned to Egypt, he was brought forth from prison, which was a sign of peace. God's having raised up Jesus from the dead, was declaring himself satisfied; it was smelling a sweet savour, as in Noah's offering. Hence he was 'raised for our justification,' after being 'delivered for our offences.'

3. *The character in which Christ was raised up*; as "the great Shepherd of the sheep." He that raised the Shepherd from the grave, can raise us also from death, and gather together the scattered sheep. Ephes. i. 18.

It implies also that Christ has a people given him of the Father, and that for their salvation he went through all his sufferings: as such he died and rose again.

Paul was a shepherd, and did all he could, and there were other shepherds also; but Christ is the "great Shepherd" of the sheep; and God having brought them forth, it was in love to the flock.

4. *The ground of his resurrection is the sacrifice* he offered on the cross.

God's having raised him from the dead, was a proof of his having accepted the sacrifice in our stead; and this affords a powerful plea in prayer.

It is this which the ascended Saviour presents as the ground of his own intercession; and all our supplications must be founded on the same plea.

5. The blood which he shed, being "the blood of the everlasting covenant," affords additional encouragement in prayer.

This language may apply to the covenant made with Christ, as it is expressed in another passage, Zech. ix. 11: or to the covenant made with us through him, and which stands opposed to the covenant of works made at Sinai.

Covenants with sinful creatures have been made through the medium of sacrifices, and the covenant of grace is founded in the blood of the Mediator; and through it, it is that we have the cup of blessing.

DREADFUL UNCERTAINTY OF THE PRESENT LIFE.

Man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil, when it falleth suddenly upon them.—Ecclesiastes ix. 12.

From the beginning to the end of this book, the sacred writer inscribes vanity on all human enjoyments; on every thing in short but the fear of God, or true religion.

When he says that "all is vanity," he does not mean to undervalue the good things of this life, but to teach us that there is a portion of ill which attaches to them all, and that there is a drawback on every comfort under the sun.

The vanity or ill which he describes in the text is that of *uncertainty*; and this he applies to both the good and evil things of the present life.

(1) In respect to the *good things* of this world, or those on which the hearts of men are set, there is an uncertainty which attends them all: ver. 11.

Men are running for the prize, but it is uncertain who shall win it: they are fighting for victory but know not who shall obtain it. They are contriving what they shall eat, how they shall get rich, and how be promoted to honour; but the issue of all is in the highest degree doubtful.

(2) An equal degree of uncertainty attends the *evil things* of this life, or things which men would willingly avoid: ver. 12.

Man not only misses his prize, as to the good, but falls into evil ere he is aware; and "knoweth not his time."

I. Notice a few of those evil things which frequently come upon us at a time when we least expect.

1. This is the case with *temptation*; and this is not the least of the evils under the sun.

We go on in the dark not knowing our time of trial. It is a principal part of the tempter's policy, to take us by surprise: hence it often happens that the greatest temptations come after great deliverances, when we least expect them.

Hezekiah, when delivered from death, was not aware of the temptation which the enemy would bring upon him, nor to what the pride of his heart would lead him. Isai. xxxix. 1, 2.

Oftentimes, when providence is blessing us, and smiling on the work of our hands, the greatest danger is insensibly approaching. Deut. viii. 12—17.

At a time when we are the most confident of our safety, we are often the most insecure. How unsuspecting was Peter, when his Saviour warned him. John xiii. 37, 38.

Even when raised to the highest pitch of divine enjoyment, and seemingly out of the reach of the tempter, we are still in danger from his attacks. Such was the case with Paul. 2 Cor. xii. 8. Such also was the time and place chosen by the enemy for his attack on Christ himself. Matt. iv.

The Lord's day and the house of God, are no security for us: for "man knoweth not his time."

2. This is the case with *adverse providences*. They come when we least expect them, and God often takes men in his net.

The calamities which fall on a nation or a people are generally unexpected: it was thus with the old world, with Sodom, and afterwards with Babylon. In an evil day they were overthrown.

Thus also it shall be with spiritual Babylon: in one hour shall her judgment come. Matt. xxiv. 38, 39. Rev. xviii. 10.

It is often the same with families and individuals: what sudden clouds have spread over them.

What a reverse has often been experienced between the morning and the evening of the same day. It was thus with Haman, and with Job.

3. This is also the case with *death*. Like a fowler or a fisher, what multitudes are drawn into his net unawares.

What multitudes are swept away in the field of battle; by pestilence, or some other sudden and unexpected cause.

How frequently also are individuals summoned in an evil hour, at an unexpected moment, and unprepared.

Some in the midst of prosperity, like him to whom it was said, 'This night, thy soul is required of thee.'

Some in

the days of their youth, when nothing but the world was before them. Some amidst their career of folly, or before they had returned to him from whom they had deeply revolted.

II. Observe how the suddenness or unexpectedness of these events tends to aggravate the evil.

This indeed is the 'vanity' which the wise man so pathetically laments—

1. It is easy to perceive how *temptations* coming suddenly and unexpectedly, renders them more dangerous. There is no being prepared for the attack, and this makes it an evil time.

2. The suddenness of *adversity and death* renders it more awful.

Think of the old world, of Sodom, and of Babylon.

What an awful surprise it was to Belshazzar, amidst his carousing, to see the hand writing upon the wall; and to the rich fool in the gospel, to be hurried away amidst all his flattering prospects of futurity. Dan. v. 5, 6. Luke xii. 19, 20.

3. The fearful uncertainty attending *all human enjoyments*, makes a great abatement from them even while they last. Man walks in darkness, in fear, and in suspense; not knowing what a day may bring forth. Prov. xxvii. 1.

III. Enquire whether this affecting truth be not applicable to some useful purposes.

Solomon in this book does not view the bright side of things, but their dark side only. It was his object to discourse on that: yet we may be allowed to view the other side.

4. Though all things in this life are uncertain to us, yet they are *known to God*; and this is an inducement to acknowledge his hand in all that befalls us. If we commit our soul and our way to him, it will make us happy, come what will. It was a relief to David to be able to say, 'All my times are in thy hand:' also to Paul, when he went up to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that should befall him there. Acts xx. 22—24. If God be our friend, nothing shall harm us; but all will be safe in his hands. 2 Tim. i. 12. 1 Pet. iii. 12, 13.

2. Their being unknown to us *is in some respects a mercy*.

Futurity is wisely concealed from us: if we knew beforehand what should come to pass, it would damp our present enjoyments, however innocent or lawful, and would stop the progress of human affairs. In this respect, mercy is mixed with judgment. Let us therefore commit all our concerns to God. Prov. iii. 5, 6.

3. The uncertainty which attends every thing in the present world may teach us the necessity of being *always ready*, and upon the watch; for we know not the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh. Matt. xxiv. 44. Let us beware of living in sin, or in a state of distance from God. 2 Cor. v. 9. 2 Pet. iii. 14.

PRACTICAL INCONSISTENCIES REPROVED.

My brethren, these things ought not so to be.—James iii. 10.

The Epistle of James is not addressed to any particular church or individual, but to believers generally, amongst the Jewish nation, or 'to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad;' and its leading design was to correct the errors into which many of these early christians had fallen. His admonition is gentle and kind, such as became the dignity of an aged apostle. With all their imperfections he still calls them "brethren;" and instead of dealing in invective or reproach, he contents himself with stating the impropriety of their conduct, saying "these things ought not so to be"—a lovely example of that meekness of wisdom which the apostle himself endeavoured to inculcate.

I. Notice the reprehensible conduct alluded to in the text.

Several particulars of it will be found in the preceding context, and such as are too common among professors of the gospel in every age.

1. A bare attendance upon the means of grace, and hearing the word, without any regard to their practical effect. This is one of the first evils which the apostle reprehends, chap. i. 22; and though of fearful magnitude, it is but too prevalent. Hearing is good, when it becomes the means of knowing and doing the will of God: otherwise it will only tend to our greater condemnation. Matt. vii. 24—27. xiii. 15. Luke xii. 47.

2. An unbecoming partiality towards persons of superior circumstances, and neglecting the brother of low degree: ch. ii. 1. Christianity was never intended to destroy those natural and civil distinctions which necessarily exist amongst men, nor to lessen the respect which is due to superiors of every description; but in the church of God it requires at the same time, that fraternal affection and lovely equality which should exist in a family of equals. When preference is shown, not to office or character, talent or virtue, but merely to worldly circumstances, it is a violation of the law of love. Matt. xxiii. 8. A citizen of Zion is one in whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. Psal. xv. 4.

3. An uncharitable and unmerciful disposition, is another of the evils censured by this apostle: chap. ii. 13. A righteous man will draw forth his soul, and deal out his bread to the hungry; and if rich in this world, he will be rich in good works, ready to distribute, and willing to communicate. But how justly and severely does the apostle condemn those professors, who, themselves in affluent circumstances, had nothing for their poor and needy brethren but a few smooth words, which left them still destitute of food and raiment. Chap. ii. 14—16. 1 John iii. 17.

4. Detraction and slander are more immediately within view of the text, as evils which ought never to have existed amongst christians: ver.

5—10. The apostle states the difficulty of governing the tongue; that it is easier to guide a ship, or curb a horse, than to keep the door of our lips. He also allows that a person who can command his tongue, has made no ordinary attainment, and may be esteemed 'a perfect man;' yet he still insists on the necessity of this kind of discipline, as essential to the christian character. Everywhere do the Scriptures condemn wrath and malice, bitterness and evil speaking; and certainly, among christians especially, "these things ought not so to be." Matt. vii. 1, 2. Ephes. iv. 31. Col. iii. 8, 12, 13. 1 Pet. ii. 1.

II. The evident impropriety of the conduct censured.

1. The evils specified are utterly inconsistent with a profession of the gospel. However it might have comported with a state of unregeneracy, to live in envy, hateful, and hating one another, it cannot be reconciled with that spiritual renovation which every believer undergoes. Ephes. ii. 2, 3, 10. 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3. To profess to be alive to God, and yet to be dead in sin, and walking according to the course of this world—to be a follower of the meek and lowly Saviour, and yet to be litigious, implacable, unmerciful: certainly "these things ought not so to be." Col. iii. 1. 5.

2. The conduct condemned, if in any degree indulged, is evidently inconsistent with growing in grace, or making any advancement in the divine life. The great object of the christian profession is to be pressing towards the mark, to be reaching after higher attainments in grace and holiness, and an increasing conformity to the will of God: but the cherishing of carnal, worldly, and malevolent dispositions, is utterly incompatible with such a progress, and will render our religion more than doubtful. 2 Pet. i. 8, 9.

3. The things reprov'd are clearly opposed to the rule of duty, and to the love we owe to Christ and his cause. When professors are living too much like men of the world, wanting in circumspection, zeal, and spiritual mindedness; when they have left their first love, are immersed in the cares of the world, and think of little besides their secular interest; when religion lies bleeding and dying amongst them—surely "these things ought not so to be."

4. Evil tempers and dispositions among christians tend greatly to dishonour God, to bring reproach upon his cause, and to injure the souls of men. Rom. ii. 24. Unbelievers are hereby furnished with an excuse, and become hardened in their impiety. Ezek. xiii. 22. Professors of this description resemble the awful characters described by Jude, ver. 12, 13.

The present imperfect state of the christian church should endear to us the prospect of a purer and brighter state, when Christ shall take out of his kingdom all things that now offend; when the Canaanite shall no more be in the land, and nothing that defileth, or worketh abomination; but when the righteous shall shine forth like the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. Matt. xiii. 41, 43.

CHRIST THE ONLY SOURCE OF LIFE AND BLESSEDNESS.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life.—John xi. 25.

Few families, even among the godly, have been so eminently distinguished as was the family at Bethany. There it was that Lazarus and his sisters lived, whom Jesus loved, and where he spent many a happy hour.

In this beloved family, the brother was sick, and tidings were sent to Jesus. The disciples did not wish to visit Bethany for fear of the Jews; but Jesus went: and the text relates a part of his conversation with Martha, as he approached the village.

There is a great depth in many of the sayings of our Lord, which renders them difficult to be understood; and it seems by Martha's answer, that she did not wholly comprehend his meaning on the present occasion, ver. 27.

I. Endeavour to explain the subject.

The general design of our Lord was to fix the faith of Martha on himself, as the fountain of life, of all life, both natural and spiritual.

More particularly—

1. The words were designed to *correct an error* in Martha's judgment; for she spoke as if his power was limited to *time*. It was his intention to raise Lazarus, and he desired to do it in answer to faith; but her expectations seemed to be very low. "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died: but I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee:" ver. 21, 22.

This was saying little more of Jesus, than might have been said of another prophet: he therefore leads her to consider himself not merely as the medium, but the fountain of life, and the author of eternal salvation.

She believed that he would raise him up at the last day; but our Lord intimates that he could at any time raise him up; and she was required to believe this.

2. His calling himself *the resurrection*, was designed to correct another error which she seemed to entertain, as if his power could only have *prevented* the death of her brother Lazarus.

This Mary dwelt upon, as well as Martha, and the Jews likewise with unbelief: ver. 32—37.

But his calling himself "*the resurrection*," was like saying, My power is not limited merely to prevention; I come not so much to prevent as to restore.

Christ did not interpose to prevent the fall, but to restore us from its ruins; to seek and to save the lost.

He does not prevent our dying; but he brings us back from death and the grave. Hos. xiii. 14.

3. In calling himself *the life*, he intended to carry the idea still farther. The first means restoring to life, but the last the perpetuity of that life.

Christ not only raises his people from the dead, but he is their life when raised. He is not only the way to heaven, but the very life of heaven itself. John xiv. 6. Col. iii. 4.

4. The *resurrection and the life* of which he speaks, represents more than the simple fact of raising Lazarus. The life which he received on his resurrection was only corporeal, and he was still liable to die again : but that of which our Lord speaks is common to all believers, as the two following sentences explain it. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die." It therefore means a resurrection to immortal life.

II. Contemplate the leading truth in the text; namely, that Christ is the only source of life to fallen creatures.

God is the fountain of life to creatures, considered merely as such; but where that life is forfeited and lost, Christ is the only restorer of it.

He is described as that life which is the light of men, ch. i. 4. He quickeneth whom he will, v. 21 : and those who live, must live by faith in him. Gal. ii. 20.

The world since the fall is like the valley of vision, or a field of slaughter, some years after a battle, covered with the slain. Ezek. xxxvii. Angels might ask, can these dry bones live? If they can, it must not be by any human power, oh Lord God thou knowest! Prophets, angels, ministers would despair: but Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

In various senses we may be said to be dead: more particularly—

1. We are *spiritually* dead, as the Prodigal was when lost to his father. 'This my son,' said he, 'was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.' By nature we are like dead bodies, without any soul for what is good and heavenly; we have no desire after God, or spiritual objects. Ephes. ii. 1.

But Christ's death brings life to the soul: through his atoning sacrifice, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus breathes upon the dry bones, and they live; and there was no other consistent way in which this life could be imparted. God would not have given his Holy Spirit, but for Christ's sake: if I go not away, said he, the Comforter will not come. Hence the great effusion on the day of pentecost. Acts i. 4, 8.

2. We are dead *legally*, as well as spiritually, dead in law as well as in fact. As sinners we were under the sentence of death and condemnation, to be banished for ever under the curse; and all the threatenings of God's righteous law stood against us. Gal. iii. 10.

But through the mediation of Christ, those who believe in him shall not come into condemnation, but are passed from death unto life. John v. 24. They come out of their graves, like Lazarus; and their being forgiven all trespasses, is equivalent to the command, "Loose him and let him go." Christ was treated for our sake as if he had been a sinner, that we for his sake might be treated as righteous. 2 Cor. v. 21.

3. We are all subject to *corporeal* death; and though we should have been raised, whether Christ had died or not, yet not to life, but to endure the second death; to be carried from prison to judgment, and there to receive our everlasting doom. John v. 29.

But believing in Christ, and receiving the atonement, we are made one with him, and shall rise with him, and sit with him in heavenly places. Ephes. ii. 6. Our resurrection to eternal life is a part of his mediatorial undertaking, and is secured by the promises which he has made to them that love him. John v. 27—29. vi. 39.

4. Through the mediation of Christ, each of these kinds of life becomes *perpetual*. Our being delivered from the *curse* will be perpetual: 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus—they shall never come into condemnation.' Being *quickened* also from a death in sin, we shall die no more: 'because I live, ye shall live also.' Being *raised* up at the last day, we shall live for ever. There is 'no more death,' no more sorrow or pain, but all tears shall be wiped away. Rev. xxi. 4.

If we wish to die and be lost, therefore, we shall turn away from Christ, and make light of him; shall prefer the things of the present world to his gospel and salvation, and depend on our own righteousness, to the rejection of his righteousness.

If we desire to live, we must believe in Jesus, come to him, and make him our all in all. John iii. 36.

THE EVIL OF SIN.

Know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts.—Jeremiah ii. 19.

Sin has not only entered into the world, but is become universal. Every individual is the subject of it, every heart is tainted with it. Had it been otherwise, we should have been more sensible of its evil nature, and more shocked at its deformity. But seeing all are alike diseased, it is but little thought of, and we are not sufficiently aware of its evil tendency. And though it is universal, yet if we obtain not a cure, its malignity will prove no less fatal on that account.

I. Enquire wherein sin consists, according to the description of the prophet.

It is here summed up in two things: "forsaking the Lord our God"—and "his fear not being in us." We may see the difference between man's view of sin, and God's view of it. Man regards the evil of sin chiefly as it consists in outward conduct, and as it affects himself or his own interest. But God traces it to its source, as originating in the disposition of our hearts towards him.

1. Every sinner has *forsaken* God. He does not desire him as his portion, but other things in preference. He is not mind-

ful of his favour, nor thinks it worth seeking after; but esteems the friendship of a fellow creature more than his. Like a prodigal son, he has no love to his father, nor concern about his honour. Every sinner says in his heart, 'No God.' He is nothing but enmity against him: the throne of heaven would not stand secure, if it depended on the sinner, whether God should reign or not. Such is the evil of having forsaken him.

2. As God is not loved, so *neither is he feared*, at least not in such a way as to depart from evil. "My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts." Because he forbears, and sentence is not executed speedily, the hearts of the sons of men are set in them to do evil. No evil is avoided, merely out of regard to his authority, but from selfish motives only.

3. From these two sources proceed *all the evils that are in the world*.

Forsaking God has been the cause of every abomination: hence all the wars, oppression, and injustice, between nations and individuals.

From the same source also arises a rejection of Christ and the gospel; a contempt of religion, and of religious people.

Hence also that hardness of heart, and indifference to the gospel, in many who attend upon it.

Hence the most solemn warnings and tender expostulations are without effect, and all the mercy of the Saviour is neglected and despised.

II. Consider the evil and bitter nature of sin.

On some accounts, it is very difficult for us properly to understand and feel this part of the subject. The subject itself is incomprehensible, and we are too much blinded by our own depravity to see the evil there is in it.

However, there are a few mediums by which we may form some idea of its magnitude.

1. We may "know and see how evil and bitter a thing sin is," *by the precepts of God's holy law*, which forbid it; and we must measure it by this rule to see what evil there is in it.

Men generally estimate the evil of sin by what is commonly esteemed in the world, or commonly practised amongst men, and by what is allowed to be harmless and excusable.

But we must appeal to the law and to the testimony. The world is a poor judge of what is right, as well as of what is true: the word of God is the only criterion by which to judge. Rom. vii. 7.

What a pure and happy world would this be, if cemented by love. How much would it then resemble heaven how evil and how bitter is the reverse.

2. We may "know and see" *by the awful threatenings of God's word*, by which it stands condemned. Deut. xxviii. 15.

The Lawgiver of the world has connected punishment with every offence: and could a Being of infinite goodness curse the creatures he has made, if sin were not an evil of inconceivable magnitude! Could a small evil raise such wrath, and kindle such a burning flame? God is displeased with nothing else but sin; and here his anger burns to the lowest hell.

3. We may know and see *by the bitter sorrows of true penitents.*

Oh what anguish of soul has it occasioned in those who have been brought to "know and see" its evil nature. Hear the groans of David, see the tears of Peter, and the deep distress of many others. Psal. xxxviii. 1—6. li. 1—4. Zech. xii. 10.

4. Know by *the bitter fruits it has already produced.* Great is the misery of man upon him; but sin is the cause of all.

What a catalogue of diseases, oppressions, hardships, and disappointments; the whole creation groaning under the load of human misery.

Yet all this is only some of the first effects of this evil and bitter thing.

5. By the still more bitter fruits *it would have produced*, if God had not restrained it. Every city and town would then have been a Sodom.

God's authority would be driven out of the world: all mankind would be hateful and hating one another. But, with all

that we see and know, we see not a thousandth part of the evil that would result, if God had not said to the waves of this mighty ocean, Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther.

6. By the *bitter pains of eternal death.* There shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever. This is the hell of fire which sin has kindled.

7. Know it also by the *bitter sufferings of the Son of God.*

What means that bloody sweat in the garden. What is the meaning of those awful words upon the cross, 'My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me!' But who can estimate the full evil of sin by this comparison: the Saviour in sorrow drowned, but not in sorrow lost!

III. Enforce the exhortation: "Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing."

1. Unless we know and see this, we can *neither know nor see the salvation of God.* This indeed is the reason why it is so little regarded: the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

2. Without a knowledge of the evil of sin, we shall *neither repent of it nor depart from it* to any good purpose. It is only as we are impressed with this conviction that we can be kept from sinning against God, or be made to loathe ourselves in his sight.

3. If we know and see it not truly in this world, we shall be made to *know and see it to our cost* in the world to come. Sooner or later we must realise the nature and extent of this awful subject.

4. If we are brought to know and see it aright, *we shall come to Christ*; and herein will be the proof of our knowledge being in some measure what it ought to be. John vi. 45.

ADVANTAGES OF POSSESSING THE SCRIPTURES.

† *What advantage then hath the Jew : or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way : chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*—Romans iii. 1, 2.

Paul's leading object in the whole of this epistle is to show that a sinner's justification with God is by faith in Jesus, in opposition to the works of the law. The Jews were for trusting in circumcision as the ground of acceptance ; and the apostle admits, that if they had not sinned, circumcision as well as other acts of obedience might be pleaded ; but that *having* sinned, their circumcision was nothing, and there was no justification with God on that ground : chap. ii. 25—29.

The words of the text are then introduced as containing an objection ; to which the proper answer is given—

I. Consider the character here ascribed to the Holy Scriptures : they are “ the Oracles of God.”

1. Observe, an Oracle is the speech or *answer of a deity*, or of some supposed deity ; as a temple is the residence of a deity, either real or imaginary. The heathens had their oracles, which they consulted on every occasion, though they were altogether a delusion, and a mere piece of priestcraft. But though all these were counterfeits, yet there were true oracles ; and these are the Word of the true and living God.

The holy Scriptures are called oracles in other passages, as well as in this. In Acts vii. 38, they are denominated “ the lively oracles.” They are not an old dead history about persons and things long ago, but are what concern the living at this day. They are not like the dead languages, but are themselves a living language, in which every man hears in his own tongue the wonderful works of God.

God's precepts are the same now, as when they were delivered at Sinai. They are not grown obsolete, but are still in force, and are spoken to us as well as to them. Deut. v. 3. His threatnings are the same now as then, and God means the same by them as he ever did, and they are all equally in force. The promises are all the same : it is God that still invites us, saying, ‘ Come ye to the waters : ’ and the invitations are equally addressed to us as to those of old.

2. The Scriptures are called oracles as containing *the first principles* of religion : thus in Heb. v. 12. They contain indeed a fund of wisdom and knowledge, as well as first principles, and are therefore to be regarded as the standard of truth. Hence if any one speak or teach, let him do it as the oracles of God speak, and be careful that his doctrine corresponds with that rule. 1 Pet. iv. 11.

3. In some instances the oracles of God are *contrasted with the oracles of the heathen*, as in Isai. xlv. 19. The heathen oracles were chiefly distinguished by three things. They affected

a mysterious concealment: but the oracles of God court examination.

They disappointed those who trusted in them: but the Lord 'never said to the seed of Jacob seek ye me in vain.' They were of an immoral tendency, had no regard to righteousness, but taught and encouraged what was evil, and consulted only the sinful inclinations of the people: but the oracles of God declare 'the things that are right,' without consulting the sinful propensities of men, and whether they would regard it or not.

II. Consider the advantage of possessing the sacred writings; this is "much every way."

It was the distinguishing privilege of the Jews, that unto them were committed the oracles of God; and it is also one of our principle advantages.

We cannot so well estimate the worth of any thing as by considering the condition of those who are without it: our commonest mercies are all undervalued, because they are common. The sun rises every day, and fills the world with light, and we think little of it: but if we were left in darkness for several months, we should then be taught to estimate its value.

Could we but see the state of the heathen world, and compare it with our own; could we but compare their general morals with those of christian countries, we should be more fully aware of the advantages which we enjoy. The Scriptures have an effect on men in general, who themselves have no love to righteousness; and they are compelled to act with some degree of decorum and good order.

David having been driven away among the heathen, by the persecutions of Saul, and obliged to wander in the land of Moab, and among the Philistines, was led from hence to form an idea of the incomparable worth of the holy Scriptures; and then it was, very probably, that he wrote his encomiums in the nineteenth psalm, and also in the cxixth.

Some of the advantages of having the Scriptures will appear, if we consider more particularly the following things—

1. What a flood of light they pour upon that subject *which belongs to our best interests*. All men are convinced that they are sinners, for all have a conscience; yet by nature are wholly in the dark, not knowing whither they are going, nor what shall be hereafter. Oh the importance of that word, which shineth as a light in a dark place, and shows us the way of life! If heathens ask, what shall we do to be saved; none of their oracles, none of their priests can tell. Neither Greece nor Rome with all their learning, could answer such a question as this. But when the Philippian jailor proposed such a question to Paul and Silas, they could answer and say, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. There is now no need to ascend into heaven, and descend into the deep: the word is nigh us, and it tells us all things. Rom. x. 6—9.

Consider how plain the directions are which the Scriptures give *on the subject of obedience*. The poor heathens are trying to please God, or rather their idols, in a thousand different ways, yet know not how: but the sacred oracles will tell us at once, and in one word, wherein the

whole law is contained.

God does not require such kind of sacrifices as their idols are supposed to do: his words are, 'My son, give me thy heart.' What does he require, but that we love mercy, and walk humbly with him.

The original inhabitants of this island had their wicked idols, like those of Moloch, in which they burned thousands of human beings alive, in honour of their deities.

Whatever use we may make of the oracles of God, and however much they may be abused, they are of the greatest importance in themselves, and it is our chief glory to possess them.

3. They are the principal means which God has used *in the conversion of sinners*. 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; sure, making wise the simple.' The *works* of God did not convert men then, any more than they do now, though they declare his glory, and his handy work. Psal. xix.

It is by the truth that we are saved; the gospel is the power of God unto salvation; and whenever the time come that all shall know the Lord, and be made righteous, and when all the people shall praise him; it shall be by his way being made known upon earth, and his saving health among all nations. Psal. lxvii. 2.

The history of the mission to India confirms this remark: from the time they translated and circulated the Scriptures, the Lord began to bless them, and not till then.

III. Application of the subject.

1. If the oracles of God were of so much advantage to the Jews, they are *much more so to us*. We have also the New Testament, which is the accomplishment of the Old: such an addition to the sacred oracles is of infinite importance.

If David could say so much of the five books of Moses, which were nearly all that was extant in his day; what would he have said of the whole Bible as we possess it in our day!

2. What a motive is presented for attempting to *diffuse the knowledge of the Scriptures all around us*.

If we wish to see mankind blessed and made happy, let us give to them the words of eternal life.

The instruction of the children of the poor is in this view a most desirable object. There are many public charities, and also charity schools, which have their use: but Sunday schools in particular have an object in view which distinguishes them from all the rest—that of giving access to the holy Scriptures.

They give the key of knowledge, which is one of the chief advantages of true religion.

3. Let us remember that the oracles of God will be of no ultimate advantage to us, unless we are brought *truly to believe* and to embrace them, so as to live under their holy influence.

Without this, they will only be a swift witness against us in the last day.

SPIRITUAL ENLARGEMENT.

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name.—Psal. cxlii. 7.

From the title of this psalm it appears that David was at that time literally shut up in prison, or at least in a dark and dismal cave; yet he prays for more than his being merely delivered out of this confinement. He wanted to be freed from those troubles and dangers, of which the cave was only a figure. He uttered these desires there, and afterwards penned them in a song of praise.

Here we may see how his mind was occupied in a time of trouble, and what was the way he took to get out of it, and how God delivered him—

I. View the condition of the psalmist as applicable to ourselves.

He was shut up in a cave as in a prison, and was in darkness, both as to body and soul. There are three cases to which his language will apply: “Bring my soul out of prison”—

1. It may be applied to the case of an *awakened sinner*, under his first concern about salvation. The condition of such generally is, that they are shut up as it were in a prison, under guilt and fear: yet they have a little hope from the gospel, which, like a ray of light shining into the dungeon, induces them to pray as David did, and as the church did in her captivity. Lam. iii. 53—56.

The darkness and misery of such a state of mind is fitly described by a prison. Sinners, when first awakened, are all in the dark about futurity, and know not what will become of them; but think they shall die where they are, and never see good. They are cut off from society, and their former enjoyments: all is dark without, and dark within. They have no comfort from themselves or others.

The sinner finds his chains inextricable: he cannot deliver his own soul, can do nothing towards making an atonement or reconciliation with God: he cannot shake off his load, nor recover his peace of mind.

All his duties and all his efforts fail him: he has neither hope nor help from any quarter but one. If Christ do not deliver him, he must remain for ever in bondage and darkness.

But if the sinner is brought to pray as David did, and to despair of deliverance from every other quarter, it will issue well at last. The Lord will deliver him from going down to the pit, because he hath found a ransom. Job xxxiii. 23.

2. It may apply to the case of a *backslider*. A believer may so depart from God as to be locked up in darkness as in a prison. Such was once David's case: his soul was in great distress and darkness, and could find no rest nor peace: he complained that his iniquities had laid hold of him, and he was unable to look up. Psal. xxxviii. 3, 4. xl. 12.

It is pleasant to walk in the light of God's countenance; but we may so displease him as to be thrown into ‘prison:’ by carnality and worldly

mindfulness, by being lifted up with pride, by making light of sacred duties and privileges, and so grieving the Holy Spirit, our religious enjoyments may all be lost, and we may be deprived of all fellowship with God, and with his people.

In this case, if we get into a state of darkness, it is hard to get out, and David found it so: hence he prayed, 'Bring my soul out of prison.' Like Jonah, we must look again towards his holy temple.

The language will apply to *various seasons of the christian life*, when locked up under divine withdrawments, and when God leaves his people to walk in darkness; and there are but few who cannot adopt the prayer in the text as their own.

It may be that God expresses his displeasure in a way of providential chastisement, when a long-continued state of distance from him issues in some heavy affliction.

If we have slighted communion with God, and not sought him in holy duties, we may be left to a state of darkness; and he will return to his place, as a slighted friend whose company was not desired. Hos. v. 15.

Or he may leave us under great darkness for a time to try our faith and love, as he did Job; but whatever be the cause, when God leaves us, we are cast into prison, shut up in holy duties, and cannot come forth. The Lord only can restore to us the joys of his salvation, and open our lips to show forth his praise. Psal. li. 12—15.

II. Consider the reason or motive of the psalmist, in praying for this enlargement: "that I may praise thy name."

1. Observe that praise is *the least return* that we can make, and this is the sacrifice which a converted soul would freely offer. While locked up in prison, he is unfit for the work of praise: if he has not known the joy of the gospel, he has never praised God to any purpose: or if he has known it and lost it, his harp is hung upon the willows, like Judah when going into captivity. Neither, while in that state, can he join with his brethren in the work of praise: his heart is not with them.

2. The *disinterestedness* of the motive. Every sinner under conviction would be glad of peace, but it is often for his own sake. The love of God excites a desire of being wholly devoted to him: to make the divine glory the great end of all, is to be one with God and with Christ.

The great concern of a real christian, when locked up in darkness, is that he can bear no part in the work of praise, can bring no glory to God while in that state, but is wholly unfit for his service. Our desires after spiritual enjoyments should all be directed to this end, to praise and glorify God: hence too, a real christian often longs to be delivered from the body, and so to be 'brought out of prison, that he may praise his name.'

3. David also promised himself much enjoyment *in the society of the righteous*, when he should be delivered: "the righteous shall compass me about." He hoped that when his deliverance came, his pious friends would be greatly interested in it: they would congratulate and rejoice with him, to hear what God had done for his soul.

Such also is the joy among christians, when any one finds deliverance from guilt and fear by looking to the cross of Christ: or when any one is delivered from darkness and bondage, or a state of backsliding from God.

It is of the nature of true religion to sympathise with others, whether in their sorrows or their joys.

RELIGIOUS STEDFASTNESS.

He clave to the Lord.—2 Kings xviii. 6.

Hezekiah not only destroyed idolatry, repaired the temple, and restored its worship; but being successful in war, he established the kingdom of Judah, recovered its sovereignty and dominion, and reduced the neighbouring kings and princes to a state of subjection and dependence. Yet the chief glory of his character and reign consisted not in his military exploits, nor in his domestic improvements; but in the purity and permanency of his religious principles. Several of the kings of Israel and of Judah were men of piety; but it was the distinguished honour of Hezekiah, that he maintained a greater degree of consistency; and that he “clave unto the Lord.”

I. Enquire, what is included in our “cleaving to the Lord.”

Believers are sometimes represented as staying, resting, and leaning on the Lord. Isai. xxvi. 3. Psal. xxxvii. 7. Cant. viii. 5. But “cleaving” to him is still more comprehensive, and supposes a closer union—

1. Cleaving to the Lord includes a fixed trust and confidence in him.

Some trust in an arm of flesh, and others in their riches, which will not profit in the day of wrath. Some in their own wisdom and strength, in their fortitude and magnanimity. But the believer trusts in God, and in the promises of his grace, for all the good he hopes for in this world, and that which is to come. He lives not upon the streams, but at the Fountain. Having wandered from mountain to hill in search of safety and happiness, and been bewildered and disappointed in the pursuit, he now centres all his hopes in God, depending on his wisdom and mercy to guide him through all the difficulties and dangers of the way, and bring him safe to his desired end. Psal. xxxix. 7. lxxi. 5. lxxviii. 7.

2. It includes an ardent and constant attachment to the Lord, as the object of our supreme affection.

Not a sudden and rapturous delight, but a calm and settled complacency; a prevailing inclination towards the Lord, and a resting in him with heartfelt satisfaction. Deut. xxx. 6.

Loye to God may be more lively and vigorous at first conversion; but it will afterwards become more judicious, settled, and abiding. And though its exercise may at times be interrupted, yet upon the whole it will increase more and more. Phil. i. 9, 10.

3. Cleaving to the Lord implies an unremitting obedience to his will. Deut. xi. 22. Josh. xxiii. 8. Thus Josiah turned not aside to the right hand, or to the left. 2 Kings xxii. 2. Zacharias and Elizabeth walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Luke i. 6. And thus christians are exhorted by the apostles of the Lord and Saviour. Acts xi. 23. 1 Cor. xv. 58.

II. Consider the importance of such a line of conduct.

1. Cleaving to the Lord is that alone which constitutes true religion.

We may cleave to a party, and be very zealous for certain opinions, and yet be far enough from cleaving to the Lord, or making him the object of our supreme regard. The unbelieving Jews were tenacious for Moses, while they rejected Christ; and the Galatians were warmly attached to their false teachers, but rejected Paul. Gal. iv. 15—17. The Corinthians were not deficient in zeal, but it was the mere zeal of a party, and not that which has God and truth for its object. 1 Cor. iii. 3.

2. Cleaving to the Lord is the only safeguard against our spiritual enemies. It was by this that Hezekiah was enabled to overcome the Philistines and Assyrians, and to establish the kingdom of Judah; and by this only shall we obtain the victory over the world. Neither watchfulness nor prayer will be sufficient—nothing but cleaving close to the Lord. Abide by me, said David to Abiathar; for he that seeketh thy life seeketh my life; but with me thou shalt be in safeguard. 1 Sam. xxii. 23.

3. This will be our security, or our support, amidst the trials and afflictions of the present life. Deut. iv. 3, 4. If we live near to God, he will be to us a covert from the stormy wind and tempest, and we shall dwell as under the shadow of a rock. Psal. xxvii. 5. xxxi. 20. Isai. xxxii. 2.

4. This will afford us peace and comfort in a dying hour. Isai. xxxviii. 1. See with what calm satisfaction Paul could contemplate his departure, when recollecting that he had finished his course, and had kept the faith. 2 Tim. iv. 7.

5. Though it gives no title to heaven, it imparts a meetness, and will facilitate our entrance into the world of bliss. 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

6. Let believers be encouraged, not only to take hold of God and his strength, but to keep their hold. The hope set before us in the gospel is like a rope thrown out to a drowning man: if he keeps his hold on that he is safe, but not else. So believers must seize and lay hold on eternal life. Heb. vi. 18, 19.

THE GRATIFICATION OF DESIRE ESSENTIAL TO OUR HAPPINESS.

The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul; but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil.—Proverbs xiii. 19.

The former part of this passage contains a truth in which all mankind seem to be agreed; it is a principle on which all are acting, though only a few will see the end accomplished. The wicked are described as 'walking according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind,' not doubting but they shall meet with the highest satisfaction, though in this they will be awfully disappointed. Taking the whole text together, there are but few who admit its import, or act on the principle it contains: there is much more implied than is expressed.

I. Explain the general import of the passage.

It seems to proceed on this ground, that while the accomplishment of desire is essential to our happiness, to depart from evil is the only way in which our desires can be gratified. Happiness is alone to be obtained in the way of righteousness.

More particularly, observe,

1. The soul of man is the subject of *boundless desires*. It is like the eye that is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing: it is thirsting after knowledge, riches, honours, pleasures. These desires are natural to man: sin did not create them, grace does not destroy them. Sin perverted them, grace regulates and directs them to their proper objects. If the soul of man longs for knowledge, it leads him to the knowledge of God: if for riches, it bids him seek the true riches, and a better country: if for honour, that which comes from God only: if for pleasures, those which are at his right hand for evermore. Man from instinct as it were thirsts for never ending good; religion shows him where and how this is to be enjoyed.

2. Nothing can afford satisfaction to the soul but *the accomplishment of its desires*. Whatever the heart is supremely set upon, there is no lasting happiness without it. But having by nature no relish for God, it seeks it in other things, and thinks to be satisfied with something short of the supreme good. A portion of some sort the soul must needs possess; and knowing of nothing better, it takes up its rest in worldly enjoyments.

3. The desire of happiness cannot be accomplished *by sinful gratifications*. These only create disappointment: they promise much, and give little. Like the tree of knowledge to our first parents, which promised to make them as gods, but made them die like men: sinful indulgencies, instead of accomplishing the desired good, place us at a greater distance from it. Even the gratification of lawful desires cannot fully satisfy the soul, nor make us truly blessed; much less those which are sinful. Eccles. ii. 3—11.

No doubt this is wisely ordered for the punishment of man, that if we seek happiness otherwise than in God, we shall never find it. Hence there are no evil desires which men gratify, but a portion of evil attaches.

Neither is it suited to our nature, that we should be rendered happy, independently of the supreme good: the soul of man is spiritual, and spiritual objects only are adapted to its capacity. Hence there is always a satiety, a weariness in the enjoyment of mere created good. In the midst of affluence, there is a want of solid satisfaction; and the repetition of our pleasures creates disgust.

Such an arrangement is in the nature of things intended for our good. It is a mercy in itself that we cannot find satisfaction without God: it was this which sent the prodigal home to his father's house, and it is a call from within to return to Him from whom we have deeply revolted. Luke xv. 17, 18.

4. Our desires may and will be accomplished *by a departure from evil*: this is the meaning of the text. The promise is, that if we return to God in a way of repentance, and by faith in Jesus, he will make with us an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David: and this shall be all our salvation, and all our desire. We shall find in our Father's house, bread enough and to spare. Psal. cvii. 9. Isai. lv. 2, 3.

II. Confirm the leading sentiment, that "the desire accomplished is sweet to the soul."

It is a fact that God really gives blessings in answer to prayer, and will give heaven at least to those who seek it; and it is equally a fact, that this tends to sweeten our enjoyments.

1. It is so in *natural things*. How sweet is that which is the result of enterprise. Hence Jacob so highly valued that portion of land which he gave to Joseph, because he had taken it from the Amorites with his sword and with his bow.

It is thus that property becomes more valuable to him that obtains it, than to him who merely inherits it: it is the accomplishment of desire, and the fruit of all his toils.

Canaan became the sweeter to the first generation of Israel than to any other, because it was the fruit of arduous conquest, and they had passed through the wilderness to possess it.

2. It is so in *spiritual things*, as well as others. What was it that rendered the coming of Christ an event so joyful to Simeon and Anna, to Zachariah and Elisabeth, but because it had been an object of intense desire, and they had been waiting for redemption in Israel. Isai. xxv. 9. Luke i. 54, 55.

It is thus in the experience of every believer: pardon, peace, and purity, as well as every other spiritual blessing, becomes the sweeter as it is given in answer to prayer and long desire. Prov. ii. 3, 4, 10, 11.

3. It will be so with respect to *heaven at last*: it will be a harvest of joy, after we have long been sowing in tears. Psal. cxxxvi. 6. Hence it is described as a place of rest to the weary, of peace to those who have long dwelt in trouble: and oh, to come to the desired haven, after a tempestuous voyage!

How sweet heaven must be to the pa-

triarchs, who sojourned as strangers in the land of promise. 'I have waited for thy salvation, oh Lord,' said the faint and weary pilgrim. Gen. xlix. 18. So, to know Christ as he is, how sweet to those who counted all things but loss for his sake. Also to be like him, to those who have long groaned under a body of sin and death. Psal. xvii. 15.

From the whole we may observe,

(1) The wisdom and goodness of God in suspending our enjoyments, and giving them in answer to our desires and prayers. Lam. iii. 26.

(2) The folly and madness of sin, in entertaining the vain hope of obtaining happiness in forbidden paths. Sin produces nothing but killing disappointment; and yet it is an 'abomination to fools to depart from evil.'

(3) The miserable portion of the sinner at last. It will be the cutting off of every hope, and the disappointment of every desire for ever!

HARVEST OF THE GOSPEL DAY.

The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.—Matthew ix. 37, 38.

In a preceding verse we have an epitome of our Saviour's life. His great work was to teach and preach the gospel of the kingdom, through all their cities and villages: and in subserviency to this, he healed all manner of sickness and diseases, according to the prophecies which went before concerning him. Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

(1) Observe, the multitude excited his *compassion*. He had felt much for their bodily diseases, but now he feels for their souls: and here all his bowels move with tenderness towards them, ver. 36.

(2) That which gave *occasion* for his compassion in the present instance, was the state of the people with regard to their teachers. They were not without instructors, such as they were; but they were without real pastors, "as sheep having no shepherd."

(3) Hence he turns to *the disciples*, ver. 37: and directs them to pray as in the text. By the "harvest" here is meant the work of gathering souls to Christ: he intimates that the labour would be great, and there were but "few" hands to do it. His direction bespeaks not only compassion to the souls of men, but also to the "labourers" themselves, for whom the work was too great.

I. Notice a few of the principal ideas suggested by the metaphor in the text, or enquire the reason why the gospel day is called a harvest.

1. This language leads us to consider it as *the fruit of preceding labours*: a harvest supposes a seed time, John iv. 35. All that

was done for four thousand years was for this : thus it is that an apostle states it, and that with a view of heightening its importance in our esteem. 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

When Solomon dedicated the temple, it was preparatory to and a type of the gospel Church, as the place where Jehovah would dwell for ever. Psal. cxxxii. 13, 14.

Not only was the work of all the fathers in this view preparatory, but even that of Christ himself; whose death was as a grain of wheat that should produce an abundant harvest. John xii. 24.

2. It is itself *a season of great labour*. There is work for all: some to pray, some to preach, some to devise liberal things.

God could accomplish his work without us, but is pleased thus to honour us. He brought Israel out of Egypt, and planted them in the land of Canaan, but it was by the hands of Moses and Aaron. Psal. lxxvii. 19, 20.

He afterwards restored them from Babylon, and rebuilt the temple and the city wall; but it was by men like Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, and others who had a mind to work.

He extended salvation to the gentiles, but it was by such men as Paul and Barnabas.

We never need expect great things, but in this way only. 1 Cor. iii. 9.

3. It is a season of *joyful labour*: all partake of the fruits of the harvest.

It is a season of joy to the husbandman, who has waited long, and been at great expense to the reapers, to the poor, to the public at large.

So it is in measure, as to the gospel day. God rejoices, angels rejoice, ministers rejoice, Christians rejoice.

4. It is in some cases a matter of concern lest it should prove *a day of grief* and disappointment.

All our hopes depend on that day: gospel times ought to excite deep concern, lest our labour and our hopes should be in vain. Isai. xlix. 4. Phil. ii. 16. 1 Thess. ii 19.

II. Apply the subject to our own times.

The reasons which our Lord uses in his address to his disciples still exist, and some of them in a greater degree.

1. Consider *the multitude of souls* now in the world, who are 'as sheep having no shepherd.' Look into the state of mankind at large; heathens, mahomedans, Jews, papists, protestants. Also what numbers there are who pretend to the sacred office, but who are no shepherds to the flock, and who do not feed them with knowledge and with understanding.

2. If we examine the prophecies, we shall find that *a much greater harvest is still before us*, than that in which the disciples were called to labour.

There were indeed great ingatherings among the Jews; but they were only as the first fruits of the harvest. Rom. xi. 16.

The increase from among the gentiles was also great, during the first three centuries; but a more abundant increase is still before us.

The leaven then began to ferment, but the whole lump is to be leavened: the stone was then cut out of the mountain without hands, and had begun to smite the image on its feet: but now it shall fill the whole earth. Dan. ii. 44, 45.

They contemplated the coming

of a long dark night, under the reign of antichrist : we look for its termination, and the time cannot be long. 2. Thess. ii. 7, 8.

3. As the harvest in the early times of the gospel was the result of a preceding seedtime ; so will this be *the result of all that is now doing in the world.*

The translation and diffusion of the old-testament Scriptures in the Septuagint, did much towards preparing for the apostolic harvest ; so will missions, and the translation of the Scriptures into the modern languages, do much in sowing the seed of a future harvest in the latter day.

Learn,—(1) That perishing sinners are no less the objects of compassion now, than they were in the times of our Lord—(2) This harvest, as well as the other, must be preceded by a seed time—(3) After all our joy and hope, and concern about the souls of others, let us carefully examine ourselves, lest while we are seeking the salvation of others, we ourselves should be cast away at last!

THE APOSTLES' PRAYER.

The apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.—Luke xvii. 5.

The occasion of this prayer seems in this place to be the exhortation previously delivered, and which required the performance of a difficult duty : ver. 4. In this view it is highly proper, as faith is the grand moving principle by which every holy duty is performed. But whatever were the immediate occasion, the prayer itself is adapted to every part of the christian life.

I. Consider the general import of the prayer : “Lord, increase our faith.”

1. Faith has respect to *revealed truth*, as its immediate object ; and in the New Testament it more especially relates to Christ, as the substance of all the promises.

He was the great object in whom they believed. Thus Peter's confession, ‘We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.’

Faith in the all-sufficiency of Christ is that to which the promise of miraculous healing was addressed : ‘Believest thou that I am able to do this? If thou canst believe, all things are possible.’

It was this which failed the disciples in the hour of danger : ‘Oh ye of little faith.’ Matt. viii. 26.

2. In praying for an increase of this principle, the apostles acknowledged that *their faith was weak.*

So indeed it appeared in a time of trial ; and so does ours too frequently, if the strength of faith, as well as its genuineness, is to be judged of by its fruits.

3. In praying for more faith, they also acknowledged *their own insufficiency* to produce it.

Faith is indeed our duty, and unbelief

a sin; but like every thing else that is truly good, it is all of grace: and it is God that worketh all our works in us. Ephes. ii. 8. Phil. ii. 13.

4. In directing their prayer to Christ, they virtually *acknowledge his divinity*.

To give or to increase faith is more than any mere creature can accomplish. A minister may offer evidence for the truth to be believed: but he can neither impart faith, nor increase it.

Christ alone is the author and the finisher of faith. Heb. xii. 5.

5. This prayer might in some measure be answered at the time, but was more especially so after our Lord's ascension. When he

came to the crown, he blessed his followers: he gave gifts unto men, and an abundance of his Holy Spirit. Acts ii. 33.

II. The reasons which render this prayer suitable to all Christians.

If we are truly the followers of Christ, yet our faith is weak at best, and needs to be increased, and that for various reasons—

1. On account of its influence in obtaining *other spiritual blessings*; for they are bestowed according to the measure of faith.

In performing *miraculous cures*, our Lord always looked at this. Many looked at worldly distinctions, but he did not: his eye was on the faith of the party. Matt. ix. 2. Acts xiv. 9, 10.

When he hesitated, it was for unbelief. Mark ix. 23, 24.

It is so in the bestowment of *spiritual blessings*: they are given in answer to the prayer of faith. Psal. xxxi. 19. Mark xi. 24.

The answers to successful prayer will also be found to be of this description. Gen. xxxii. 26.

2. Its influences under *dark and trying providences*. Nothing but faith can sustain us under them. Psal. xcvi. 2. What could Jacob have done but for the influence of faith? 'I will surely do thee good,' the promise said; yet nothing but evil appeared.

What could he have done afterwards, when his children seemed to be taken away, in whom the promises were to be fulfilled?

What could the pious captives have done in Babylon, had they not been sustained by faith in the divine word. Hab. ii. 3.

What could we do amidst dark and threatening providences, and when Zion is covered with a cloud, were it not for the support which faith derives from the promises?

3. Its influence on the *deep mysteries of divine truth*, which faith only can receive and apply. Truth is like a deep fountain, and faith is the only means of drawing from it: it lies far beyond the reach of the carnal mind, and even of the greater part of modern christians.

The doctrine of Christ crucified, of God manifest in the flesh, and the wondrous extremes which meet in the person and work of Christ, are like an immense ocean. The powers of reason could do nothing here; and reason, if she attempted to fathom it, would soon be drowned.

But faith is like a little bark, borne along the mighty waves, and conducts us safely into harbour.

The only enquiry of a true believer is, hath God said it? Then I receive it: Lord, increase our faith!

4. Our *spiritual enjoyments*, as they are derived wholly from the promises, are proportioned to the degree of faith. The consolations themselves are no less now than in primitive times. Christ is the

same yesterday, to day, and forever: the gospel is the same, our prospects are the same. If our enjoyments are not the same, it is owing to the want of faith.

What christians might we be, had we but more of this! Instead of God's house being a house of mourning, it would be a house of joy: instead of dragging on heavily, we should run in the way of his commandments with enlargedness of heart: instead of fretting under the frowns of the world, we should rejoice in every tribulation. Rom. v. 2, 3.

The promises are full for this life, as well as for that which is to come. We only want faith to realize and enjoy what God has given us in his word.

4. The influence of faith *on our life and conduct*, renders this prayer peculiarly suitable and important.

Without faith it is impossible to please God: nothing is done right, nothing is acceptable. Where it is weak, and mixed with much unbelief, it will leave us lifeless and inactive.

This also is the case where any of the leading doctrines of the gospel are doubted or denied. The Galatians ceased to run well, when their minds had been corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Gal. v. 7, 15, 16.

On the contrary, where faith is lively, all will be alive. Heb. xi.

The disciples in our Lord's life time believed a little, and did a little: but afterwards how great the difference!

As preachers and as hearers, in prosperity and in adversity, faith in God is the life of all activity, and of submission to his will.

6. Its importance *in the hour of death*, renders it unspeakably desirable.

We know nothing of hereafter but by faith: with much of this we shall be prepared to meet the last enemy, and shall even desire to be offered up. Lord increase our faith! 2 Tim. i. 12.

WICKED PROFESSORS THE BANE OF THE CHURCH.

Among my people are found wicked men.—Jeremiah v. 26.

Thus it was in Jeremiah's time, thus it has been in every age, and thus it is now. The invisible church is pure and undefiled, but the church on earth is not so; for no society of christians is endued with a spirit of infallibility, to know the secrets of the heart. And were it even possessed, it may be doubted whether it would be proper to act upon it, in the admission of persons to communion.

The truth expressed in the text is illustrated in three of our Lord's parables, as stated in one chapter;—that of the ten virgins—the tares and the wheat—and the net cast into the sea. In the second of these our Lord forbids a hasty and inconsiderate zeal in inflicting church censures, intimating that the time for a thorough separation is not yet come.

I. Notice the imperfect state of the church on earth.

1. The church of God is here called "his people." It consists of

such as appear or profess to be his people, and who in consequence of such profession, are so denominated. Surely they are my people, saith the Lord; children that will not lie. Isai. lxiii. 8. Rom. ix. 25. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

Those who are really God's people are variously described in Scripture; as the people of his holiness, a willing people, a praying people, a chosen generation, a peculiar people; as the spiritual seed of Abraham, as Jews inwardly, whose circumcision is that of the heart. Phil. iii. 3.

2. Among these there is an unhappy mixture of "wicked men," who have thrust themselves into the church, or made a profession of religion.

The people of God have indeed their failings and imperfections, and there is not a righteous man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not. They are sinners that must be saved by grace, and are looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life; but they are not allowedly "wicked," and can solemnly appeal against such a charge. Job x. 7. Psal. xviii. 21. cxix. 101, 2.

Nevertheless, among them there are those who are either secretly or openly wicked—

(1) Some professors of religion are openly profane and worthless. Their sins go beforehand to judgment, while the sins of others follow after. The show of their countenance testifies against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom. They walk according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and are by nature children of wrath. They shut their eyes against conviction, and harden themselves against reproof. Their hearts are unsanctified, and their lives are offensive to God and to good men. These are raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame. Jude 13. Yet such there are in our families, in our neighbourhood, and in all our religious assemblies; and such there will ever be on earth. But there are none such in heaven; nothing that defileth can enter there. In the church above, all is wheat gathered into the garner, without any mixture of tares; all gold, and no dross.

(2) Some professors are secretly wicked, making religion a cloak for their covetousness, and their numerous sins. They have a name to live, but are dead; they profess to know God, but in works deny him. Titus i. 16. 1 Tim. v. 6. Many of this description find their way into religious society, and pass undiscovered. There was an Achan in the camp of Israel, a Judas among the apostles, an Annanias at Jerusalem, a Simon Magus in Samaria, a Jezebel at Thyatira—and such there are in all the churches of the saints.

(3) Some christians are such by profession only, deceiving and being deceived. Some hypocrites impose only upon others, but there are not a few who impose upon themselves, mistaking imaginary graces for the fruits of the Spirit, and mere convictions for true conversion. Religion has had some influence upon them, without producing any saving effect, and they are yet in their sins. They possess, it may be some amiable qualities, but have nothing good in them towards the Lord God of Israel. They abound in good things, but want the one thing needful; they have lamps, but no oil. They say, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we, but are of the synagogue of Satan. They say that Abraham is their father, but Abraham never knew them, and will never

own them. They say that they are Jews, and are not; apostles, and are found liars. John viii. 54. Rev. ii. 2, 9. These are wells without water, and trees without fruit. Jude 12. Many such intrude into the society of the godly, and have fellowship with them in holy ordinances; but Christ will thoroughly purge his floor, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Matt. iii. 12.

II. The guilt and danger of false professors, who mingle with the people of God.

1. They bring reproach upon religion, and cause the ways of God to be evil spoken of. His name is blasphemed through them, and Christ is put to an open shame. Rom. ii. 24. Heb. vi. 6.

2. The hearts of the godly are grieved, and their hands are weakened. Achan was a troubler of Israel, and they were defeated before their enemies, while he was in the camp. Josh. vii. 12, 25. 1 Chron. ii. 7. The carnal professors at Philippi were also a great grief to the holy apostle. Phil. iii. 18.

3. False professors tend to harden the impenitent, and to confirm them in their unbelief. Jer. ii. 33. Psal. liii. 4. Oh how many sins have they to answer for, besides their own!

4. The church of God is defiled and injured by them. Heb. xii. 15. Evil professors are like poisonous plants that spread their baneful influence around them; and whole communities have by their means been brought to desolation. Hos. v. 3. A little leaven will go on to leaven the whole lump. 1 Cor. v. 6—8. Gal. v. 9, 10.

5. The guilt of such persons is highly aggravated, and they bring upon themselves swift destruction. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked, but especially to those who sin against light and knowledge, and who remain impenitent under the means of grace. They know their Master's will, and do it not, and therefore shall be beaten with many stripes. God has given them space for repentance, and they have not repented. They have been planted in a fruitful soil, but they have brought forth nothing but wild grapes. Isai. v. 5. Hos. x. 1. Woe unto thee, Chorazin, and woe unto thee, Bethsaida! Matt. xi. 11.

(1) Learn from hence, that however wicked professors may disguise themselves, sooner or later they shall be put to open shame. Amos ix. 3. Often in this world they are detected, as Judas and Demas were; but if not, all the churches shall know that the eyes of the Lord are as flames of fire. Rev. ii. 18, 23.

(2) That may be a true church in which some disorderly members are found, for God does not disown his people because there are some unworthy persons among them. There is a mixture in all communities, though it should ever be our concern to prevent it as much as possible. Rev. ii. 2. 2 Cor. vi. 17.

(3) How little is a mere profession of religion to be trusted in, or boasted of. The goat, though folded among the sheep, is a goat still, and must be finally separated from the flock. Matt. xxv. 32, 33.

(4) Let this subject lead us to self-examination, and let each say as the disciples did, 'Lord, is it I.' Matt. xxvi. 22. 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

IMPORTANCE OF MAKING RELIGION THE CHIEF CONCERN.

My son, give me thine heart.—Proverbs xxiii. 26.

This is the language of wisdom, assuming the office of a teacher, and requiring what of all other things is most important in order to our receiving instruction.

We are also taught to consider such language as the voice of God. Heb. xii. 5.

We might notice who it is that makes the requirement—what it is he demands of us—and on what ground the superiority of his claims are rested.

(1) Observe, *the claimant* is the God against whom we have sinned—whom we have treated worse than the prodigal did his father; and yet he condescends, through his beloved Son, to solicit our return.

Such is the affecting idea given us in Hos. iii. 1. He bids the prophet to love a faithless wife, if he could, appealing at the same time to his feelings as a man: and the prophet did it in a vision, only to signify that such must be the love of God to Israel, if he ever returned to them any more.

(2) *What it is* he demands of us; namely, the heart, the first place in our affections.

He asks that, without which, all we offer is nothing before him; that which we ask of a child, or a friend.

He must be loved, and loved supremely, or not at all; and this is needful in order to a compliance with every other requirement.

(3) What are *the grounds* on which the superiority of his claims depend.

There are many claimants for the heart; and to most of them it would be dishonour to hearken. Carnal pleasure sparkles in the cup, and says to unsuspecting youth, ‘give me thine heart.’ Wealth presents itself before the man of business under every inviting form, and solicits the same regard.

Titles and honours offer themselves to the notice of the aspiring and ambitious, and urges a similar claim.

In opposition to all these, Christ puts in his claim, and says, ‘My son, give *me* thine heart.’ Surely we can be at no loss to know which of these claimants have the greatest right; which of them is the most lovely, and which has done the most for us.

Surely we are not debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh; but to the Spirit. Rom. viii. 12.

The importance of making religion our chief concern, is a sentiment clearly taught us in this passage, and which demands our immediate attention.

It is not sufficient to make religion the concern of old age, merely to prepare us for heaven; it must be the business of our whole life.

Every one has a chief concern, ‘one thing’ which he desires and seeks after, or gives his heart to, above every thing else; and according to what that is, such are we.

The object of our supreme desire

may be the world, or to gain wealth; and like Judas, we may be willing to sacrifice every thing to that end. Or our minds may be set

on self-indulgence, and we are saying to ourselves, 'Soul, take thine ease;' or we may have given our hearts to objects that are less exceptionable.

But any thing that is loved more than God, is inconsistent with true religion.

Truly good men love God above all; they give him their heart at first conversion; and though they may pass under great changes, they never give their heart to another.

Their language is, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.'

They also love his cause above every other interest, and prefer Jerusalem above their chief joy: when it goes well with her, it goes well with them.

There are two or three things by which we may judge what it is that occupies the first place in our hearts, and so ascertain our real state and character—

I. Enquire what it is we take most pleasure in thinking about.

It is true indeed, that no man can be always thinking of one thing: many things must necessarily occupy the mind: but some one thing will be our proper element. On this the mind will dwell spontaneously: it will naturally fall into this subject in its leisure moments, when the pressure of other things is removed.

What then is it that the mind ordinarily and most naturally falls into, when sitting in the house, or walking by the way? Can we say with David, 'How precious are thy thoughts unto me, oh God; how great is the sum of them.' Psal. cxxxix. 17. Hence also that sweet counsel, given us in Deut. xi. 19.

It is not our forcing the mind once in a while to attend to divine things, but feeling at home in them, as our constant theme. This is for religion to be our chief concern, and this is giving God our hearts.

II. What mental exercises do we engage in with the greatest delight?

We are occasionally engaged both in civil and religious duties: but in which are we most in our element—in the work of the Lord's day, or in that of other days? Where do we find the greatest pleasure; in reading the Scriptures, or in perusing mere worldly productions? In drawing near to God, or in plunging into the cares of life?

Good men consider worldly pursuits as their greatest toil and labour, and go to God for rest. Others make religion a toil and labour, and the world their rest, for there they are most happy. But this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous. Psal. cxvi. 7. 1 John v. 3.

III. What is it to which we make every thing else subservient?

There is always something which we regard as most necessary, and

other things of less importance. There is always something which we can find time to attend to. A man of the world can command time for his secular interest: he will always take care of that, even if he rise up early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness.

Now a christian, if he give God his heart, will always command time for his best interest. What is it therefore that is made to bend and accommodate itself to other things?

Doeg finds it convenient to become a Jew: he goes to worship, but is detained before the Lord, and perhaps is thinking all the while how he shall best recommend himself to Saul. 1 Sam. xxi. 7.

It is the state of the heart that determines our character and condition; and we can do nothing in religion, unless our hearts are wholly given up to it.

THE IMPENITENT MALEFACTOR.

And one of the malefactors, which were hanged, railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.—Luke xxiii. 39.

It was not enough for the wicked Jews and their rulers to take away the life of our blessed Lord, but they must do it in a most cruel manner—they must crucify him. Nor was this sufficient to express the enmity of their hearts: they will endeavour if possible to render his death infamous, and overwhelm his cause with everlasting shame and contempt. Hence every circumstance is added which can increase the ignominy of his sufferings: he must be crucified between two malefactors, to intimate that he was himself one of the same character.

But God overruled it for good: it should fulfil the prophecy which had declared, that he should make his grave with the wicked; while it also expressed the depth of his humiliation and abasement. Isai. liii. 9.

I. Notice the conduct of the impenitent thief.

Several things are implied in the language he used concerning Christ—

1. It discovers an awful degree of *insensibility and hardness of heart*. Could this man find no better employment, than to rail on the dying Saviour? Most men when they come to die, lay aside their animosities; begin to bethink themselves, and tremble at the approach of death and eternity. But here is a poor hardened sinner on the brink of an eternal world, with all his guilt unpardoned, dying an inch at a time; yet feels no concern about his soul, but spends the last moments of his life in railing accusations. What, 'dost thou not fear God?' No: such is the hardening nature of sin.

2. Observe his *inhumanity and cruelty*. If Christ had been

a sinner like himself, yet being a fellow sufferer, decency and humanity would have called for sympathy.

What, was it not enough that the Roman soldiers had mocked and derided him, and crowned him with thorns; and that the multitudes should wag their heads at him as they passed by?

No: this man can neither feel for himself, nor feel for others: oh the cruelty of his conduct!

3. His language bespeaks the most *envenomed malignity*.

Some unhappy wretches, if they have any gain in view, will rail one at another; or if they have any thing to fear, they may do it.

But this man had nothing to hope for; his doom was sealed, and the government would show him no favour.

He had nothing more to dread from man; for he was now expiring on the cross and in a few minutes would be no more.

Probably he had neither seen nor heard of Christ till now, and could have no possible motives for his conduct, besides what were furnished by pure malignity.

4. His *insolent folly*.

Hear his manner of reasoning: "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us!"

But might he not *be* the Christ, and yet not save himself? Was it not because he *was* the Christ, that therefore he did not spare himself?

Might he not also be the Christ, and yet not save this hardened sinner; who instead of being humbled for his offences, now glories in his shame?

Must Christ come down from the cross in order to give him a proof of his being the Messiah? Such was the folly and wickedness of this hardened malefactor.

II. Observe the conduct of Christ towards him.

He made no reply, and took no notice of his railing accusations—

1. He left him to *perish in his sins*.

He preserved a dignified silence, which said in effect, Let him alone: and he was given up to the hardness of his own heart.

'Be no mockers, lest your bands be made strong—Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish.'

2. He left him as *an example to others*, how to treat railing accusations.

Oh how true is it of our Lord, than when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not. 1 Pet. ii. 23.

Like as a Lamb that is led to the slaughter, so he opened not his mouth. Isai. liii. 7.

The best way to answer and to silence railing accusations is to take no notice of them: 'answer him not a word.' Jude 9.

NATIONAL PROSPERITY.

Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children ; whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood. That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth ; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace ; that our garners may be full, affording all manner of store ; that our sheep may bring forth thousands, and ten thousands in our streets ; that our oxen may be strong to labour ; that there be no breaking in nor going out ; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy is that people that is in such a case ; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.—Psalm cxliv. 11—15.

When David was exalted to the throne of Israel, he possessed the feelings of a father towards his people ; and like a good man, he seeks the welfare of his country as his leading object. He had fought the battles of Israel, and God had prospered him whithersoever he went ; and now he prays for Israel's prosperity.

We may learn three things from this passage : first, wherein the true prosperity of a country consists : next, the means by which it is to be promoted : and lastly, the use that should be made of it.

I. Consider wherein the true prosperity of a country consists.

This is generally expressed in ver. 12—14 : and the description is given in a very interesting manner. It comprises four things :—that the rising generation be such as to become the ornament and support of society—that the necessities of life abound, for the supply of man and beast—that they be happily secure from invasion and captivity—and that all descriptions of people be contented and happy.

1. It is of great importance to public prosperity, that *the rising generation be the ornament and support of the community* : “plants and corner stones.”

If the rising age be found to be sober, modest, ingenuous, obedient to parents, faithful and diligent ; such a generation of young people inspire life into the body politic. But if vain, loose, deceitful, disobedient, faithless, idle, dissipated ; no good can follow.

They are the persons who must hereafter fill every department in society ; and what they are, that will society be in general.

But if this be true of any state, *much more of Israel*, God's nation, which was the depository of true religion. Things never went well with them when it was otherwise.

In the times of Joshua, things were thus, and then the nation prospered. This it was that filled Balaam with such admiration. Num. xxiv. 5—9.

But when Joshua and that generation died, the next knew not the Lord, and were not prospered.

As Israel was a religious nation, the words before us may be considered as a *prayer for the church*, as well as for the state.

And oh how delightful to see young people giving themselves up to God

in their youth ; becoming "olive plants" in his garden, and "corner stones" in his building ; the strength and ornament of religious, as well as of civil society. A generation of praying, spiritual, active young people, are a blessing to the church and to the world.

2. It is essential to the prosperity of a nation that it be enriched *with the necessities of life*, both for man and beast : ver. 13. The holy land abounded with excellent fruit, and brought forth royal dainties : but the prayer in our text only specifies necessities, or what may be stored in "garners" for the winter, or for a time of want. The luxuries of life form no part of the prosperity of a nation, but often prove its ruin. Idleness and fulness of bread led to the destruction of Sodom.

In the eastern part of the world especially, they were liable to frequent famines and droughts, which made it necessary to fill their garners, as may be seen by the conduct of Joseph in Egypt ; though such things are not common with us.

3. It belongs to the prosperity of a people, that they be *secure from invasion and captivity* : ver. 14. Nations in every age have been subject to these things, from that spirit of injustice and oppression which prevails among the great and powerful.

God's people were seldom known to engage in offensive wars, though they were often called to act in their own defence. When they sinned, God suffered their enemies to "break in," to invade and desolate the country.

The Assyrians broke in upon them, and then there was a "going out" to captivity : afterwards the Chaldeans and Babylonians.

Hitherto we have been preserved from such calamities : how soon the enemy may be suffered to break in upon us, we cannot tell, nor what would be the consequences.

4. That all descriptions of people be rendered *contented and happy*, so that there be "no complaining in our streets." It is a sign of prosperity when a spirit of oppression is crushed, and generally discountenanced : when justice and mercy pervade society, and when cheerfulness and contentment are diffused throughout all classes.

This will be the case when the rich and opulent become kind and friendly to the poor, and when the poor shall not envy the rich. This indeed is a part of public prosperity which we have never witnessed in any great degree, and perhaps we never shall, till the general state of the world is ameliorated by the diffusion of the gospel.

II. The means by which public prosperity is to be promoted.

"Rid me and deliver me from the hand of strange children : " ver.

11. By these are meant the ungodly among the Israelites, who were like unnatural sons, and not worthy of being called the children of Abraham. Their speech was fair, but deceitful : their hand was stretched out to help, but no dependance could be placed upon them : ver. 7, 8.

1. These ungodly characters tended to *injure the rising generation* ; were like weeds among the olive plants, and as rubbish about the building. Both the nation and the church may therefore offer up the prayer in our text, and especially, that flatterers and sycophants may not be suffered to stand before the king.

2. The sins of the ungodly brought down *the judgments of Heaven upon the nation*: sometimes in a way of famine, and at others of war and captivity. The three years of famine in the times of David, was for Saul and his bloody house. 2 Sam. xxi. 1.

3. All the *breaking in* and *going out* was owing to the wickedness of these strange and ungodly children. Hence the Lord contended with them, and suffered them to be invaded and carried into captivity. He may also suffer us to feel similar calamities, or the bitter effects of civil discord.

4. The *numerous complaints* that were heard, would in great measure be owing to the same cause: the injustice and oppression of strange children, or the discontent of others of a similar character.

God answers the prayers of his people sometimes in a way of judgment, and sometimes of mercy; and by one means or other he will "rid and deliver them from the hand of strange children." Saul was cut off on Mount Gilboa, and this was a good riddance to Israel. The captivity also took away much of the dross from the nation.

Sometimes the Lord answers the prayers of his people by turning the hearts of men, and giving a new direction to public affairs: and thus we may pray, both for the world and for the church.

III. The use to be made of the subject.

David we see gave it a religious turn, directing the people, while they were praying for temporal blessings, still more highly to value those which are spiritual.

Blessed is that people says he, "whose God is the Lord:" ver. 15. This is the greatest of all: and as they had his statutes and judgments, they are hereby taught to prize them. A goodly number of Israel were men whose God was the Lord, both for this world, and that which is to come.

Here we may learn—

1. Highly to value our *religious advantages*. We possess chiefly what Israel had, and which was truly advantageous. Rom. iii. 2. More than this, we have the gospel which their kings and prophets sought but had not.

Blessed are our eyes, for they see. We have our sabbaths, and the liberty of worshipping God, without the fear of interruption. Compare our state with those who live in pagan, mahomedan, and popish countries.

Without this, there would be nothing to rejoice in after all. If the rising generation were ever so accomplished; though our garners were full of all manner of store; though there were no breakings in nor goings out, and no complaining in our streets; yet we should not deserve the name of a happy people, without our religious privileges. But if these be properly esteemed, we shall be truly blessed, even though many other things were denied. Although there be no fruit on the vine, no herds in our stalls, nor flocks in our folds; yet we may rejoice in the Lord, and be glad in the God of our salvation. Hab. iii. 17, 18.

2. Let us learn *to get wisdom* by our privileges, and our mercies.

A price may be put into our hands, and yet we have no heart to turn it to any good account. Let us read and understand the sacred

oracles: let us call upon Jehovah, who is known amongst us; that he may be our God for ever and ever, and our guide even unto death. Psal. xlviii. 14.

IMPORTANCE OF ATTEMPTING THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS.

He who converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.—James v. 20.

The whole of this epistle is of a practical tendency; and especially towards the close of it a number of important hints are given, suited to the case of believers at that time. Some of them were oppressed by the great, and they are exhorted to the exercise of patience; ch. v. 8. Some were persecuted and provoked to revenge, and they are admonished to forbearance: ver. 12. Some afflicted, and they are encouraged to pray: ver. 13. Some were turned aside, and others are to seek to recover them: ver. 19.

(1) Observe, the character here described is that of *a sinner*. All men are sinners, but this means a sinner who is going in the way of death, going on still in his trespasses.

(2) He is nevertheless supposed to have had some *knowledge of the truth*, and afterwards to have “erred” from it. Such is the case of many who have been educated in the truth, and of others who have made some profession of it for a time. 2 Pet. ii. 20. The recovery of such is very rare indeed: yet we are not to consider any in the present world as in a hopeless condition; but means are still to be used for their recovery.

(3) Though spoken of a sinner of a particular description, the text is applicable in a great degree to *sinners in general*. They are all in the way of death, and he that saves one of these will accomplish a great work.

I. View the description given of a sinner’s way, as leading unto death.

There are three things pertaining to it worthy of notice—It is erroneous—progressive in evil—and fatal in its issue.

1. The way of a sinner is *erroneous*. What is said of this character, strongly marks the connection between principle and practice: they that know the truth are made free by it, while others are enslaved.

The way of the ungodly however is not always the effect of error in the conscience, or in the understanding; for they often act contrary to their convictions, and know it to be wrong while they pursue it. Yet there is an error in the heart: they think that if it be wrong, yet it is good for them, and desirable to make them happy. But this is a great error, and full of self-deceit. Prov. xiv. 8. All the errors that are in the world may be traced to this source: they arise pretty much

from self-delusion, and a wilful departure from the way of truth.

False and deceptive notions of one kind or another, lie at the bottom of all the evils which abound in the world. In some cases it may be pharisaical presumption, which leads men to think they can repent at any time when most convenient to themselves.

In others it may arise from antinomian despair, which leads to the opposite conclusion, that they can do nothing; and therefore care nothing about the matter, farther than to indulge the presumptive hope that they shall be saved at last.

2. The way of a sinner is described as *progressive in evil*.

It may have begun with a single error; but the text supposes that if his way be not stopped by effectual conversion, it will soon become a multitude of errors, and lead to "a multitude of sins."

This denotes its tendency to accumulate, and that it impels to the repetition of evil, by increasing the desire after it. It is of the nature of sin to blunt the edge of conviction, to harden the heart, and so to remove the dread of evil; and this makes way for more. Sin is also very prolific; its way is to 'increase unto more ungodliness,' like weeds in a garden, which grow and multiply, and overrun every thing else; and thus it takes full possession of the soul.

The beginning of an evil course is like the letting out of waters. Conversion to God is stopping the breach, arresting the sinner in his course, and sending him back again.

3. It has its *issue in death*; not merely corporeal death, but that which sin produces, when left to finish its operations: ch. i. 15.

The death here intended is eternal, the second death, the utter extinction of all hope: it is sinking into the gulph of despair, into a state of bitter weeping, of unavailing reflection, and endless woe.

II. Observe what is included in converting a sinner from such a way.

Conversion is the changing of one thing into another; but every change is not conversion to God.

Sinners may be induced to refrain from evil, through a variety of motives, foreign from true religion or the love of God. Fear and hope may have their influence: but nothing is done, unless the heart be set against evil. Without this, the profligate is only changed into a pharisee, and even this will be very transient.

To be truly converted is to be brought over to God's side, to be humble and teachable in his way, to be weaned from the world and sin, to love holiness, and long to possess it.

This is the point we must aim at. Many conversions fall short of this: some have considered those as converted who have occasionally had strong convictions, while their hearts remain as they were.

But true conversion consists in repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and not in any thing short of this.

The word of God must not only have an effect upon the mind, but it must take root there. Matt. xiii. 23.

III. Our encouragement to attempt the conversion of sinners in this way, and to labor to the utmost to accomplish it.

God only can convert a sinner efficaciously. Ministers and parents can bear painful testimony to this in their own experience, and the insufficiency of all means without his powerful co-operation. But he uses men as instruments of good to others : this is his ordinary way: and as sinners are often destroyed by one another, so believers are saved by one another. 1 Tim. iv. 16.

Our text affords encouragement for ministers in preaching the word, and for christians also ; for if “any one” convert a sinner, he shall save a soul from death : whether it be by the word, by conversation, by reproof, by visiting the sick, by acts of kindness and providence, by example, or by any other means. Let us therefore attentively consider the important objects gained by the conversion of a sinner to God—

1. It *saves a soul from death*. Think of the immortality of the soul ; or the worth of the soul ; what it is capable of suffering or enjoying. All the wonderful achievements of armies or navies, allowing them to be glorious, are trifling when compared with the salvation of an immortal soul. If we gain a friend for Christ in this world, he may be the means of converting many more ; and we may have so many more crowns to cast at his feet another day. There is joy in heaven over “one sinner” that repenteth ; what then will be the joy, when myriads are converted and saved.

2. It will also *hide a multitude of sins*. Who can tell how much evil has been prevented in the world, by the conversion of such a man as Manasseh, or Paul ! ‘One sinner destroyeth much good ;’ and one believer may produce much good. By the conversion of a sinner too, the sins which could not be prevented shall be pardoned ; and so they shall be hid. Psal. xxxii. 1.

If such be the value of one soul, what will be that of many ? In this view how important it is to introduce the gospel into *a town* or a village, and to establish a christian church there ; in which souls may be converted and saved, from one generation to another. Much more important to *a nation*, to have the gospel planted in the midst of it. Oh what healings does it afford ! Psal. lxxvii. 2. Rev. xxii. 2.

Let us beware after all, lest we ourselves be unconverted. While we are trying to save others, let us see to it that we ourselves be saved !

CONNECTION BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.—Romans viii. 1.

A principal part of this epistle is occupied on the great doctrine of justification by faith. The text contains as it were a summary of the whole, and shows us the connection there is between justification and sanctification. Its propositions are, ‘He that is in Christ Jesus is free from condemnation; and he that is in Christ Jesus walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.’ Our being in Christ Jesus is that on which both depend, and it is from him that both are derived.

I. Enquire what it is to be “in Christ Jesus,” as the great prerequisite of all spiritual blessings.

It is a phrase very common in the Scriptures, and denotes that living union between Christ and his people which is the effect of faith. This is sometimes represented by the union of the vine and its branches. John xv. 5. By the union between the head and members of the body. Ephes. v. 30. By the bridegroom and the bride. 1 Cor. vi. 17. By the union of the food we eat, with the body. John vi. 56, 57. Gal. ii. 20. 2 Cor. iv. 11. Like the cities of refuge in Israel, Christ is the hope set before us: to be “in him” is to have fled for refuge, and laid hold of him. Phil. iii. 9. Heb. vi. 18.

II. Consider the connection this has with our justification; or which is the same thing, our being “free from condemnation.”

1. Observe the nature of *the condemnation to which we are exposed*.

This respects us as transgressors of God’s holy law, and is truly awful. It consists in having all the curses of the book of the law standing against us, and the wrath of God abiding on us. Deut. xxix.

The only difference between condemnation and damnation is, the one is the sentence of the Lawgiver, and the other its execution.

There is also a difference between the condemnation of the Lawgiver, and that of the Saviour: the one may be removed, the other cannot.

While we are under condemnation, God’s law is the adversary by the way; and there is no agreeing with him, but by embracing the doctrine of the cross. Luke xii. 58.

2. The *gracious reverse* of this sentence: there is “no condemnation” to a believer.

All the curses are reversed, and all the threatenings removed: all are turned into promises and blessings.

There is now a change of state: who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Sin is forgiven, and the sinner accepted: he has peace with God. Our offer-

ings are accepted: our afflictions are no more sent in wrath, but in mercy. God treats us as his children: we are of the household of faith, and all things work together for our good.

3 *The way in which this is accomplished.* By our being "in Christ Jesus."

It is not of works: not of faith itself as a virtue of ours, but as uniting us to Christ. 1 Cor. i. 31. Phil. iii. 9. Christ is made heir of all things; and being made one with him, we become joint heirs of all that he possesses. Rom. viii. 17.

Not that we are so united to Christ as that what he did and suffered was actually our doing and suffering: but the sinner believing in him, God considers them as if they were one: so that his death exempts us from death, and his righteousness is imputed for our justification.

We are treated as righteous for his sake: and he though innocent is treated as if he were guilty, that we might be treated as if we were innocent. Rom. iii. 22. 2 Cor. v. 21.

III. The influence which our union with Christ has on our sanctification.

Those who are in Christ Jesus, "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Union with Christ is attended with a real as well as a relative change, and this prevents the objection of its giving liberty to sin.

No one is free from condemnation, but by being "in Christ Jesus;" and no one is in Christ Jesus, but such as walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Justification and sanctification are inseparable.

The terms "flesh" and "Spirit" are here contrasted, and denote the opposite principles of sin and holiness.

To "walk after the flesh," is to be in a carnal and corrupt state; to be governed by what is carnal, and to act under the influence of worldly principles.

To "walk after the Spirit," is expressive of an habitual course of piety, so as to seek and prefer spiritual objects and enjoyments.

The connection between this, and our being in Christ Jesus, is obvious. There is no walking after the Spirit in worldly men: none in mere pharisees: none in those who are convinced of sin, and are only alarmed about the consequences. All their religion is from fear, and not from love. But when once the soul is really united to the Saviour, he becomes a source of life, and the vital principle of all its exercises: every spiritual good is derived from him. John xv. 4, 5.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) The great concern is to be found in *Christ*. All the labours of the apostles tended to this: their invariable language was, "He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son of God hath not life: He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life: There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus."

(2) We see in what sense *justification* is ascribed to *faith*. Not from any merit in it, but as being that which unites us to the Saviour.

Thus was healing ascribed to faith, though all the virtue came from him. Matt. ix. 22.

(3) Instead of this doctrine being unfriendly to holiness, there is *no holiness without it*. If not in Christ Jesus, and freed from condemnation, you walk after the flesh, and not after the Spirit; and will continue to do so.

(4) There is no well grounded *peace*, but in this way. If we have not believed on the only-begotten Son of God, the wrath of God still abideth on us. John iii. 36.

THE PLEASURES OF TRUE PIETY.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
Proverbs iii. 17.

Whatever be our age or circumstances in life, pleasure is the object after which the heart of man aspires; but the greater part of earthly enjoyments are unaccompanied with peace. They are surrounded with innumerable snares, and there is death in the cup. The great concern therefore is to enquire after a species of enjoyment, in which these bitter ingredients are not found, and where pleasure and peace are both united. This is found in true religion, and in that only.

I. Illustrate and confirm the truth taught us in the text.

Here we shall notice what are the ways of true religion, and how they are accompanied with pleasure and peace—

1. The first of these ways is *the fear of the Lord*. This is the beginning of wisdom, and of all true religion in the heart.

This in new-testament language is the same thing as repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever there may be of religion without this, is not walking in wisdom's ways. You may read, and hear the word, and attend on means of grace; but you are not in her ways, without repentance and faith; and whatever pleasure you may find in all this, it is altogether spurious.

Walking in wisdom's ways is the beginning of a new life, a setting out for heaven in the path that truth has set before us.

The sorrow of repentance may be bitter for a time, but it is a bitter sweet. The pleasure of weeping at the foot of the cross exceeds every other pleasure.

The Philippian jailor, amidst all his distress, rejoiced, believing in God. The Eunuch no sooner found the truth, than he went on his way rejoicing. Acts viii. 39. xvi. 34. This pleasure is also mingled with solid peace. Rom. v. 1. xv. 13.

2. Another part of wisdom's ways consists in *searching into the mind of God*, or the glorious truths of the everlasting gospel.

There is a source of intellectual enjoyment in studying the works of

creation : but what a difference in contemplating this subject, with and without a God, and the world with and without a providence. But in the gospel we find a greater work than all these. The work of redemption is the richest of all subjects, and engages the attention of angels. Ephes. iii. 17.

Here also peace is connected with pleasure : here is a christian feast, and no danger of excess.

3. Another part consists in *walking in christian fellowship*.

And oh how good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Psal. cxxxiii. Friendship and affection are

the source of true enjoyment amongst rational creatures ; and happiness can be found only in proportion as they exist. But religion opens a new source, and presents us with new and additional motives for affection and esteem, and so of pleasure ; and by this means it heightens and endears all our attachments. David and Jonathan would not have been so united in soul, but for the influence of religious principle.

Here also is peace. No fear of the union being dissolved by death, but peace and joy may reign for ever.

4. Devoting ourselves to the *interest of Christ*, and labouring by every means in our power to promote it, is another of the ways of true wisdom. If thy heart be with his heart, his interest will be yours ; and then you will find pleasure in it, like that of the returning captives. Psal. cii. 14. Or like the builders of Jerusalem, who had a mind to work. Neh. iv. 6.

In this path we shall find peace as well as pleasure : the satisfaction arising from the service of Christ exceeds every other satisfaction.

5. Wisdom leads us in the way of *doing good to mankind in general*.

It fills us with compassion for the poor, with sympathy towards the afflicted, and induces us to seek the good of all : and this is the way of true blessedness.

A man of an envious or malignant spirit, may find some pleasure in gratifying it, by tormenting others ; but he can have no peace. The heart and conscience are at variance.

But to love mankind, and do good, is sweet.

6. *Taking God's will as our rule* in all the affairs of life, and leaving consequences, is another part of wisdom's ways.

To do right, and leave it : to say, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel : in all our ways to acknowledge him. Herein true pleasure and peace are found. Beasts of prey may shift for themselves ; but the sheep of his pasture must know the shepherd's voice, and follow him. Psal. xxiii. John x.

7. Submitting with *meekness and contentment* to all the appointments of providence.

Such was the example of our Saviour ; and if we learn of him, we shall find rest to our souls. Half the misery that is in the world, arises from discontent.

How true then are the words of our text.

II. Inferences from the subject.

1. We may learn from hence, how to estimate the *carnal pleasures*

of a wicked world. In all their mirth and levity, in all their dissipation, do they find pleasure? They may : but have they inward peace? No : how little therefore does it deserve the name of happiness.

2. How unreasonable are the *objections made to true religion*, as if it were unfriendly to our interests or our happiness. This is one of the deceptions which Satan passes on a deluded world.

3. What reason to *congratulate* those who are walking in wisdom's ways, and who are decided in their hearts for God. The lines have fallen to them in pleasant places, and they have indeed a goodly heritage. Yours also is true enjoyment : be your portion mine.

Yours also is only the beginning of pleasure, but the foretaste of what is still to come. Psal. xiv. 11.

4. Hear what the testimony of Wisdom is to all. "This is the way, walk ye in it." Nothing but destruction and misery will be found in any other. Rom. iii. 16, 17.

THE SINNER'S RUIN AND RECOVERY.

The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.—Galatians iii. 22.

One of the chief devices of Satan is to corrupt the gospel, and this he has accomplished in all ages. The false teachers in the churches of Galatia corrupted the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ ; and in so doing they perverted the whole gospel, and introduced in effect another gospel.

Having corrected this fundamental error, it is the apostle's design to establish the great and leading truth, everywhere apparent in the christian system ; and he does this by rejecting the works of every law as the ground of acceptance with God, pronouncing the whole world to be under sin and the curse, and that salvation is alone by faith in Jesus.

I. Enquire into the meaning of the phrase : "hath concluded all under sin."

All mankind, without distinction, are pronounced sinners, and are shut up under the curse ; the sentence has passed upon them, and they are consigned over to punishment. Rom. iii. 9—23. That all have sinned, is witnessed by every one's conscience : but that all should be shut up under sin, as in a prison, is what very few persons consider.

The language of the text implies the following particulars—

1. That men are not the subjects of a few frailties and imperfections only, as pride and self-flattery pretend, but are considered as *conspirators and rebels against God*, and so are shut up as in a prison.

There is a principle of rooted hostility against God : men by nature are his enemies, and they show it in every way they can. God's throne and life would not be secure, if within their reach. Rom. viii. 7.

2. It is implied that *the conspirators are detected*, and completely in the hands of God, like rebels who are tried, cast, shut up in prison, and awaiting their execution. There is a 'strength' ascribed to the law, such as it exercises over fallen man, binding him over to the final judgment. 1 Cor. xv. 56. See him arrested and bound by the strong arm of justice ; and then compare his awful situation with those idle conceits which would represent man as being on terms with his Maker.

3. That in this situation the sinner is *unable to deliver his own soul*, nor can any effort of his own avail him. There is no help for him in man, or in an arm of flesh, nor hope from any quarter. The law can do nothing for him : all is fear and darkness.

4. That this is not the condition of *a few of the worst of men only*, but of *all*, whether Jews or gentiles. Whatever difference there may be amongst men, as to degrees of guilt, all are worthy of death, and are under one and the same sentence. There will be different degrees of future punishment, but all must die eternally.

II. The evidence given us of this awful truth : "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin."

Their uniform language pronounces this ; and the sentence of the Scripture is the sentence of God.

1. This will appear from *the curses of the divine law*. Deut. xxviii.

Such language could not have been used by the God of love, nor could he have pronounced the sentence of eternal condemnation, but upon the supposition that sinners had become inveterate enemies to his throne and government.

2. *The sufferings of Christ* demonstrate the awful fact. He would not have been made a sacrifice upon any other ground than that of the absolutely lost and ruined state of man. would never have been made a curse for us, could the sentence have been removed by any other means.

3. *The fulness of gospel blessings* bears testimony to the same affecting truth. What means redemption by the blood of the cross the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace adoption into the family of God but that we are aliens, enemies, and in a state of eternal condemnation.

III. The reason why the Scriptures have concluded all under sin ; namely, "that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

The reason might have been, that they all may be punished like the fallen angels. Jude 6. But oh what grace that this sentence is reversed.

What then is the import of "the promise?" It is the promise of justification unto life, and of eternal salvation. The purport of all this is,

1. That salvation might appear to be what it really is—*of grace*,

of mere grace. That which comes by "promise" is opposed to that which comes by the law, ver. 18. Its being given to "faith" also denotes the same thing: it is of faith, that it may be by grace.

2. As faith has respect to Christ, it is intimated that the promise of salvation *is given wholly for his sake*, as Job's friends were accepted through his mediation. Job xlii. 8. This too is the way in which God must be sought by us; namely, by faith by faith in the name of Jesus.

(1) Learn from hence the awful state of sinners, *under the curse* of the divine law, prisoners arrested by the arm of vindictive justice.

(2) There is yet a state still more awful, and that is, being *shut up in unbelief*. Rom. xi. 32. This has been the state of the Jews ever since the time of our Lord, and of many gentiles also, who have been given up to judicial blindness and hardness of heart; not merely as sinners in common with others, but as such who have judged themselves unworthy of eternal life. All men are shut up under the curse of the law; but these are like the barren fig-tree, under the curse of the Saviour.

(3) Whenever the Jews are called and saved, it will appear to be of *rich and sovereign grace*. In the same way also is the salvation of every other sinner effected.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT DAY.

The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.—2 Timothy i. 18.

Mention is made in the context of a general defection from Christ, and of Paul's being forsaken in a season of persecution, ver. 15. But in this time of trial there was one that kept close to him, faithful amongst the faithless found. He had heard Paul preach at Ephesus; and going afterwards to Rome, where Paul was a prisoner, he sought him out and found him.

And now, what return can the apostle make for his kindness? He could not requite him in this life: he therefore refers him to the last day, the day of final reward. He prays not only for Onesiphorus, but also for his family, it being usual with God to bless the families of good men for their sakes. This also affords great encouragement to stand by the cause of God in a time of danger, when many are apt to forsake it, lest their family should suffer by it. The best way however of providing for our children, and of seeking their good, is to be faithful to the cause of Christ under all circumstances.

I. The apostle's description of the last Judgment.

He calls it "that day." This expression is very emphatical, more so than any specific description could be; and implies,

1. That it is a day *distinguished from all others that have gone before it.*

There have been many remarkable days that we have seen as *individuals*. The day of our birth is so: it is the commencement of an immortal existence. There have also been many remarkable days in our life, that have had a great influence on our happiness or misery; and these are deeply fixed in our memory.

The day of our death is still more important: that is the day in which the thoughts of man perish.

There have been many important days which have befallen *mankind*, and which have been as it were days of judgment in miniature. Such was that in which Noah entered the ark

the day in which Lot went out of Sodom the day in which Jerusalem was destroyed by the Chaldeans, Zeph. i. 14, and afterwards by the Romans, Luke xxi. 25—27.

But all these are lost and swallowed up in "that day," in that great and terrible day of the Lord, which is still to come.

2. It is the day *to which all other days are preparatory.*

It is the grand assize of the world, in which all the accounts of mortals, from the beginning to the end of time, will be called over.

All the days of our life are a seed time: that is the general harvest.

These are the days in which we run the race: that is the final goal.

In these we are going forth with our lamps: then it is we meet the bridegroom.

In these we are preparing for the trial: in that day the cause will be decided.

II. The importance of finding mercy at that awful crisis.

The subject has a bright side as well as a dark one, like the cloudy pillar in the wilderness.

Mercy will be found in that day, and grace is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul looked forward to it with humble confidence, ver. 12, and taught others to do the same, iv. 8.

Peter anticipates it with ardour, and Jude fixes his eye steadfastly on this great event. 2 Pet. iii. 12. Jude 21.

The chief end of Christ's second coming is to be glorified in his saints: the condemnation of the wicked is only subordinate. 2 Thess. i. 10.

There are three things which will heighten the "mercy" to be found in "that day."—

1. *The strictness of the trial.*

Persons often escape conviction at an earthly tribunal, though not at all entitled to mercy. Sometimes from the incompetence of their judge, the want of sufficient evidence, or some trifling informality. But here God is judge himself: every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become guilty before him.

Then therefore we shall be made to feel our need of mercy, even though we have believed in Christ.

2. *The decisiveness of the sentence.*

If there be no mercy then, there will be none afterwards: no higher, no other tribunal to which we can appeal.

Being condemned by the law, we applied to the Saviour, and found mercy, as a criminal that petitions for his life to the king: but this will be like the king himself signing the death warrant, and delivering up the offender to execution. It is the extinc-

tion of all hope, and that for ever. Oh to find mercy in that day !

3. *The awful condition of those who will be cast.* It was a great thing for Noah and his family to find mercy, when the world was drowned ; and for Lot, when Sodom was destroyed by fire ; and this mercy was heightened by a consideration of the state of those who perished around them. But oh what will be the condition of those who are cast in the final judgment and what the mercy, to be spared at that awful moment ! Psal. cxxv. 5. Mal. iii. 17. Matt. xxv. 46. Luke xiii. 25—28.

III. The connection there is between this, and the exercise of mercy in the present world.

There is indeed no connection, in a way of merit or desert, and no proportion between the mercy exercised by us, and the mercy to be hoped for in the great day ; nor are any works of sinful creatures acceptable to God. The idea of rewards to fallen men supposes the interposition of a Mediator ; that we have truly believed in him, are accepted in him, and that our services are accepted and rewarded for his sake. Thus it is, that a cup of cold water given for his sake, shall not lose its reward. Onesiphorus had compassion upon Paul in his affliction, and he shall find mercy of the Lord in the great day.

1. We learn hence, the importance that is stamped on man by his immortality. Man associates with every thing around him, and is naturally attached to the present world. But a day will come when all these will go to wreck and ruin : yet man survives.

2. The necessity of repentance and faith in Christ. Nothing can avail without this, and no mercy is to be expected in this world, or in that which is to come. Let us not deceive ourselves with vain notions of mercy at last, if not brought to believe in Christ now.

FUTURE PURITY AND GLORY OF THE CHURCH.

The place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name shall the house of Israel no more defile; neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places. In their setting of their threshold by my thresholds, and their post by my posts, and the wall between me and them, they have even defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in mine anger. Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them forever.—Ezekiel xliii. 7—9.

The prophet in this chapter seems to have had a vision, which represented to him the glory of the church of God in the latter day, under the idea of a temple filled with the divine glory: ver. 1—5.

The text, though delivered in a preceptive form, seems rather to be a prophecy of the purifying of the church in the latter day.

Several things are here intimated—

(1) That they had in past ages *defiled God's holy name*, in setting up their threshold by his thresholds; that is, in whatever form God had at any time set up the true religion, they invented something of their own to resemble it, and set it up in opposition to it; so that where God had a church, there Satan would have a synagogue.

(2) In the latter day these corruptions of true religion *shall be done away*, and the temple of God shall be cleansed from all pollution. This indeed shall be one of the distinguishing features of that interesting period.

The Canaanite shall no more be found in the house of the Lord: the outer court shall be taken away. Christ shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity.

(3) That then the Lord will *dwell in the midst of his people* in a singular manner. His "throne" shall be there, and it shall be as "the place of his feet."

Their sun shall no more go down, nor the moon withdraw itself; but the Lord shall be an everlasting light, and their God their glory. Isai. lx. 20.

I. Notice the description given of the state of religion in the world, previous to the latter day.

Whenever God has set up the true religion, men have invented something of their own to resemble it, and have set up "their posts by his posts," either in opposition, or to afford some imaginary aid; and the history of all false religion may be traced to this source.

Men have acted as the magicians of Egypt did; they have endeavoured to do that by their enchantments which should resemble the works of God. Wherever there has been a true coinage, there have counterfeits been circulated.

God revealed himself as the object of *religious worship*.

And when this was done, men invented idols and set them up, and gave his glory to another, and his praise to graven images. As though this were not sufficient, they deified "the carcases of their kings."

He afterwards appointed *sacrifices* of atonement, as mediums of worship. And when this was done, the heathen nations did the same; so that all their idols had their sacrificial offerings, as well as the true and living God.

The Lord gave his word, the lively oracles, as a *revelation* of his will.

And when this was done, the heathen priests had their oracles too, which were spoken in secret, in dark places of the earth. Isai. xlv. 19.

Hence the Hindoos have their shastres, the Mahomedans their alcoran, and most other nations their sacred books.

God raised up *prophets*, and sent them to enlighten the world.

And when this was done, the heathen had their sybils, their priests, their temples, and their altars. Thus they have set up their threshold by his thresholds, and their posts by his posts, to defile his holy name.

Even *the Jews* themselves, who were God's peculiar people, did the same as the heathen; and when they were cured of their idolatry by the captivity, they sunk into a superstitious veneration of traditions, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

If we come to the times of the New Testament, we shall find the course of mankind to be much the same.

God sent his Son into the world, as the *Messiah*, who had long been promised. And soon many false Christ's made their appearance.

He wrought *miracles* in confirmation of the truth. And when this was done, there were abundance of lying wonders, with all deceptableness of unrighteousness. 2 Thess. ii. 9, 10.

God appointed his Son to be *the head of the church*, and to be head over all things for the church; gave him a name that is above every name, and all power both in heaven and earth. And when this was done, then antichrist appeared, and assumed the same prerogative, sitting in the temple of God, and shewing himself that he is God.

Christ and his apostles delivered a *pure gospel*. But some have corrupted it, and others have invented another gospel, which is not the gospel of Christ; and have preached another Jesus whom the apostles did not preach.

Christ appointed a pure and *spiritual worship*. And this has been followed with a farrago of ceremonies pretending to be of divine appointment. There is not a single ordinance but what has been corrupted; and a whole system of practical godliness has been followed with a loose morality, conformable to the temper and customs of the present world.

All these things are adapted to destroy *the efficacy of religion*, and are the devices of Satan for that end. They "defile God's holy name;" for his name has been ascribed on all false religion, in

order to corrupt that which is true; and thereby God has been dishonoured.

II. Consider the removal of all these disorders by the universal spread of the gospel.

When the Lord shall build up his temple, and appear in his glory, there shall be no threshold set up by his thresholds, nor any posts by his posts.

1. Observe, this is *an important truth*, which it will be highly interesting for us to contemplate. All idolatry shall be done away, and all those gods which have not made heaven and earth, shall perish from under these heavens.

All heathen sacrifices, heathen oracles and shastres shall be swept away: all their astrology and necromancy, which form a principal part of heathen worship, shall be chased away by the light of the gospel; and Satan shall deceive the nations no more.

Popery, Mahomedanism, all false systems of religion, and every corruption of christianity shall be destroyed; and the temple of God shall be cleansed and purified.

This is the case already where the gospel prevails, and will be so universally.

2. It is a truth which the spread of the gospel *fully accounts for*.

When the true light begins to shine, the darkness of error must pass away. All disaffection to the truth, and to undefiled religion, will either be destroyed, or greatly confined in its operations.

This is the case already in the same proportion as the gospel prevails in any place.

III. The blessed effects that shall follow. "The Lord will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever."

The gospel shall then have its full effect, and shall not return void or empty. Isai. lv. 10, 11.

1. All *false religion tends to exclude God*, and to hide his presence from us. It builds "a wall" of separation between him and us. Hence, as christian societies have degenerated and become corrupt, God has departed from them; and their house has been left unto them desolate. But the truth will secure his presence and blessing, and he will dwell in the midst of his people. Psal. cxxxii. 13, 14.

2. A corrupted gospel has *no good effect on sinners*. Preaching it is like doing nothing; no souls are converted, no good fruits are brought forth by it. But when the truth as it is in Jesus shall every where be proclaimed, then the weapons of our warfare shall be mighty through God, and he will dwell amongst us.

3. A spurious gospel does *no good to christians themselves*. It does not quicken their graces, nor cause them to abound in every good word and work; but produces a contrary effect. Gal. v. 7—9.

But the prevalence of a pure gospel will have a transforming efficacy, and God will glorify the house of his glory.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) Let us enquire whether any part of the charge in our text belongs

to us? If we are wise in our own eyes, self-willed, or self-righteous; we are setting up our threshold by his thresholds, and our post by his posts, and are thereby dishonouring God's holy name.

(2) Does the renovation here promised to the church, interest our hearts? If so, we shall pray for it, and long for its appearance.

(3) If there be ever so few in our day who worship God in spirit and in truth, let it be our concern to be of that number, and God will be with us, if we be but few.

CHRIST'S NATIVITY.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.—Matthew ii. 1, 2.

Though our blessed Lord made his appearance among men under circumstances peculiarly humiliating, and in a manner totally devoid of all external pomp and grandeur, yet there were not wanting some extraordinary occurrences to announce his birth, to attest his mission, and awaken the attention of mankind. The raptures of good old Simeon, on his presentation in the temple; the grateful homage of Anna the prophetess, who 'spake of him to all that looked for redemption in Jerusalem:' the joy of the shepherds, the song of the angels, and the adoration of the eastern sages, all added to the splendour of that memorable day, and are doubtless recorded for the instruction of all future generations.

I. Observe who they were that came from the east on this occasion.

They are stiled "wise men," or magi, from whence the term magician is derived, though we are not here to understand it in its utmost extent of application. They were persons addicted to the study of wisdom, a sort of theologians; but as they were devoted at the same time to the science of astronomy, they obtained the name of magi, or magicians. We generally affix some opprobrium to this term, conceiving that all attempts to penetrate what God has involved in obscurity, are utterly inconsistent with the modesty and humility of the christian character; but in the earlier ages, and in the absence of divine revelation, the contemplation of the planetary system for religious purposes, or the ascertainment of future events, might be viewed in a more favourable light.

These wise men came "from the east" to Jerusalem, from Arabia or Chaldea, probably the former, which lay east of Judea, and was then involved in heathen darkness, though there were individuals among

them who differed from the general mass. Those who came to Jerusalem on this occasion appear to have been serious reflecting men, of a contemplative character, who availed themselves of the light they already possessed, or they would not have been favoured with such displays of divine condescension. Probably they were such as are denominated 'devout men among the Greeks,' such as had renounced idolatry, and devoted themselves to the worship of the true God.

From the character of these persons it is natural to infer, that there may be some among the heathen who are not totally ignorant of God, and who by a secret divine influence are led to him as the only object of religious adoration, and of humble confidence. We are warranted at least in this conclusion, that none are rejected purely on account of their being placed in situations or circumstances over which the will has no controul, but that 'in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.'

II. The object of their visit—to attest the birth of our Saviour.

On their arrival at Jerusalem they announced the advent of an extraordinary personage, desiring to know where he was, and alleging that they were directed in their enquiries by a preternatural appearance in the heavens. "We have seen his star," the emblem of royal dignity, and therefore conclude that he is "King of the Jews," the mighty Prince so long foretold, of whose coming we have heard, and who is to set up a kingdom, that all nations and kindreds, and tongues and people may fall down and worship him.

In addition to the prevailing expectation among the heathen as well as many of the Jews, that an extraordinary personage would shortly appear, the state of the times, and the fulfilment of prophecy sufficiently indicated the approach of such an event. The sceptre had departed from Judah, and was assumed by Herod, who was of foreign extraction; many were looking for redemption in Jerusalem, and all men 'wondered that there was no intercessor;' there should also come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre should arise out of Israel; and now therefore the time was at hand, when the promised Messiah should make his appearance in the world.

Having seen his star in the east, the wise men are "coming to worship him." The term itself may signify no more than that civil homage and respect which was usually shewn to superiors by the act of prostration; but in the present instance it was accompanied with offerings, and other circumstances, which seem to intimate that a certain degree of religious homage was intended. The Arabian philosophers not only brought "gold," which was commonly presented to kings and princes; and "myrrh," which accompanied the funeral rites of distinguished persons; but "frankincense," which entered into all their sacrificial offerings, as if to express that kind of homage which is paid only to the supreme Being. Be that as it may, inspiration has assured us, that he who was born at Bethlehem, to be the Ruler in Israel, had his goings forth from of old, even from everlasting; and that the child born, and the son given, was also the mighty God, and the everlasting Father of his people. Mic. v. 2. Isai. ix. 6.

III. The purposes for which these remarkable circumstances are recorded, or why they were permitted to occur on this occasion.

1. It was fit that he who was born king of the Jews, should be signalled at his birth as King of kings and Lord of lords. He who had by inheritance a more excellent name than the angels, who dwelt in the bosom of the Father from eternity, and had so large a share in 'the counsel that was between them both,' required to be ushered into the world with a splendour corresponding with the real dignity of his character. About to accomplish the wise and mysterious purposes of his own mind, in the assumption of our nature, it was fit that his goings forth should be measured and distinguished by no ordinary occurrence. When 'God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran, his glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise; the everlasting mountains were scattered, and the perpetual hills did bow.' How much more, when he is coming forth for the redemption of a ruined world, should we expect that his footsteps would be marked with peculiar grandeur, and that heaven and earth would attest his presence.

2. The coming of the wise men from the east, especially, seems intended to represent, that the blessings to be dispensed by the incarnate Redeemer were not to be confined to one nation or people, but diffused among all nations. The Arabians lived remote and were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, yet they are the first to seek after Christ, and to rejoice at the appearance of the star which announced his advent. Their coming also from so great a distance, indicated the great design of the incarnation, which was to gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

3. God's having selected the wise and learned of the east to witness these extraordinary appearances, to offer gifts, and to present themselves in humble adoration, seems intended to intimate, that persons of the highest rank, and possessing the most splendid talents, should be willing to consecrate themselves and their all to Christ. All kings shall worship him, all nations shall bow down before him. The best use indeed that can be made of superior attainments, is to prostrate them at the feet of Him who gives a dignity and a glory to every object with which he comes in contact.

The example before us suggests the enquiry, what have we done for Christ? We have seen the ardour of the eastern magi in seeking after the new-born Saviour, their anxious enquiries, and humble adorations: and have we prostrated ourselves before him? We have beheld his glory, not in the lineaments of an infant, but in the full maturity of manhood, going forth in the greatness of his strength, conquering and to conquer. We have seen him abolish death, and him that had the power of it, by rising from the tomb, leading captivity captive, and ascending far above all principality and power: and have we enquired with ardent solicitude, Where is God our Saviour? "Sirs, we would see Jesus?" How does the conduct of the eastern sages rebuke the insensibility of many who are called christians!

The magi worshipped the infant Saviour, and paid him homage. Do we fall down in humble prostration of mind before him, and call upon the name of the Lord, that we may be saved? This is the very term of eternal life, and there is salvation in no other. Acts ii. 21. Rom. x. 13, 14.

They offered gifts to Christ; gold, frankincense, and myrrh. He does not ask these things of us: he has surrounded with glory and honour. He only demands the heart: and is this surrendered to his authority?

They rejoiced in the transient illumination which directed them to the Saviour. But how clear and permanent the light which we enjoy: and do we rejoice in it? Are we following Christ, that we may have the light of life? John viii. 12. xii. 36.

If we acknowledge Christ to be our King, where is that self-renunciation which he requires? Do we prostrate our understanding and our conscience before him; and are we prepared to give every thing for his sake? On these terms only can we be his disciples.

✓ MERCY OF THE SAVIOUR TO A BENIGHTED WORLD.

And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not. I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.—Isaiah xliii. 16.

(42. 16)

The general design of this prophecy is to foretel the coming of the Messiah, and the setting up of his kingdom in the world, especially among the gentiles. In order to this, the preceding verse represents great changes as taking place in the world like those produced by earthquakes, and other natural convulsions; and all this is to issue in the conversion of the heathen nations.

I. Notice the condition of poor sinners, previous to the grace of Christ being extended towards them.

It is supposed that they are "blind;" that they "know not the way;" are strangers to all that is interesting in religion, and surrounded with "darkness." Every thing appears "crooked," and out of place.

1. Observe, this blindness and ignorance respects *the way of salvation*, a way which they 'know not.' They may have light and knowledge in other things, and abound in the wisdom of this world; but in the things of God they have no understanding, and know not the way of peace.

2. It includes the want of *objective light*, as it respects the gentiles, who were gross idolaters; and this may be intended by the term "darkness."

Having no written revelation, they are without God in

the world, and without hope.—But the darkness is chiefly *internal*: blindness is a disease in the subject, and leaves a person in the dark at noon day, the same as at midnight. Heathens are in the dark in both respects; while unbelievers under the gospel are so in the latter sense only.

3. This blindness is *moral*; it relates to the state of the heart, rather than of the understanding. It is not for want of powers, for they have eyes and see not, but owing to the aversion of the heart from God and heavenly things: ver. 18.

It is a wilful blindness, or a blindness which they choose; their eyes they have closed; they have loved darkness rather than light, and desire not the knowledge of his ways.

Hence it is that the wise and prudent of this world are blind, while babes understand the gospel. If it were purely intellectual and natural, it would be excusable; but this blindness is the principal condemnation. John iii. 19.

Let us notice more particularly, how this description corresponds with fact, with respect to those who enjoy the light of the gospel.

(1) Persons of *quick discernment* in other things, are here in the dark: they know how to get wealth, how to please men, and how to make their way through the world. Many will enter into the arts and sciences with great facility, yet cannot learn to go to God as poor lost sinners, and plead for mercy in the name of the Mediator.

They cannot see how they have done so much against God as his gospel supposes; cannot see the need of their being born again; nor the necessity of so great a Saviour, and so great a Sanctifier.

This is the case with multitudes who read the Scriptures, and sit under an evangelical ministry. Sin has blinded their eyes; and like the men about Lot's door, they cannot find the way.

(2) All those ways of *righteousness and peace* which are enjoyed by christians, are to unbelievers totally unknown. They have their troubles as well as others, but know not the way to obtain real relief under them: they feel themselves guilty, but not the way to the cross of Christ.

They sometimes read the bible, but the book is sealed: they attend upon divine ordinances, but without profit, or any real satisfaction. They hear of the glory of Christ, and the felicity of being with him; but they can see no beauty in him why he should be desired, nor understand how any thing can be preferred to the present life.

(3) All *those great truths* which appear so full of glory to a true believer, and into which angels desire to look, present nothing interesting to the view of carnal men, and there is nothing in them to give delight.

Owing to the deceitful medium through which they view religious objects, they appear to be "crooked" and mysterious.

It is said of the Lord, that he is holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works; but to them, his ways appear to be unequal.

The precepts and penalties of the law, and the sovereign distribution of mercy, though full of wisdom and of equity, appear also to the sinner to be unequal; and he cannot be induced to relinquish every claim, so as to be dependent on grace alone.

II. Observe the effects of that mercy which visits a benighted world.

1. Sinners are thereby *brought home to God*.—It is not said that he shall lead them to away, but “by a way;” nor is any thing said, as to whither he would lead them; that is understood. True conversion is the sinner’s return to God. His language is like that of the prodigal, ‘I will arise, and go to my Father:’ all true religion tends that way. There are some convictions which drive the sinner from God; but those which are spiritual and saving will not fail to bring him to his feet. All genuine repentance has this tendency; and the soul will desire to lie low before God.

2. Sinners are brought home *in a way that they knew not*; that is, by faith in Christ. They might some of them never have heard of it before; or if they have, they never seriously thought of it; or if they thought of it, yet they never till now saw any fitness or glory in it.

But how delightful the prospect which the sinner now has, in beholding the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world.

3. They are led in *paths of pleasure* and of peace which they had not known. Searching into the mind of God, walking in christian fellowship, seeking the good of others, and the glory of God, are paths in which they never walked before, nor knew any thing of the pleasure attending them.

4. Those things which appeared as *darkness, now become light*; and those once crooked, now appear straight. Those things which gave great offence, are now the joy of his heart. Christ is all, and the sinner is nothing: the way of holiness is now found to be full of sweetness and full of peace.

III. The assurance given, that where this change takes place, it shall come to a good issue.

If God were to forsake us, we should fall away and perish after all; but he has graciously added, These things will I do unto them, and “not forsake them.” God is of one mind, and all his gifts and callings are without repentance: he will never regret what he has done for a poor sinner.

Yet there is no ground for presumption because it is only as persevering, that we can take the comfort of the promise. If any man draw back, he has reason to doubt the reality of his own religion; and my soul shall have no pleasure in him, saith the Lord. Heb. 38.

HONOUR AND INTEGRITY ESSENTIAL TO THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

Let integrity and uprightness preserve me : for I wait on thee.—
Psalm xxv. 12.

Some virtues are necessary to form the basis of the christian character, and others to embellish and to adorn it. Among the former of these, "integrity and uprightness" are the most prominent; they are necessary in the very outset of a religious profession, and no stability of character or principle can be expected without them. Extrinsic virtues of a more brilliant description may shed a transient luster; but if a constellation of them could be made to centre in one person, unaccompanied with integrity and uprightness, he would only resemble a painted sepulchre, beautiful indeed without, but full of rottenness within and putrefaction.

Notice a few of those evils from which the cultivation of these virtues is adapted to "preserve us."

Integrity and uprightness will be our best preservative against the power of temptation in general, as well as the particular evils and dangers to which we are individually exposed. He who has only a faint and imperfect view of the worth and excellency of these stirring virtues, and is not habitually under their influence, so as to make them the fixed and established rule of conduct, will on the recurrence of a suitable temptation easily fall a prey, and find but little difficulty in breaking through the restraints of moral obligation, or of exemplifying a gross violation of the rules of common rectitude. But where these principles are rooted and fixed as the basis of character, they will afford the most powerful protection, such as we especially need, in a world where we are exposed to so much danger, and surrounded with such numerous temptations, that they meet us at every avenue, and touch us at every point; where sin in every form is a perpetual antagonist, maintaining an interminable warfare.

It is necessary however to be a little more specific; and therefore, let us observe,

1. That integrity and uprightness will infallibly preserve us from the most intolerable of all evils, the upbraidings of our own minds, and the stings of conscience. Whatever temporary success may attend a course of deception, yet he who practises that art can never stand well with himself, his conscience is at perpetual war with him, and he is rent by intestine broils. He dares not look within to see what is passing in his own heart; or if he can make the survey without shame or remorse, it only shows that he is sunk into the last and lowest state of degeneracy. And who then would expose himself to the endless reproaches of his own conscience for the sake of a transient good, a mere phantom of what it represents; which eludes the grasp of the pur-

suer, while a recollection of the means employed for its attainment settles and rankles in the breast, till it is inflamed with divine wrath, and burns with intolerable fierceness.

Conscience will also apprise a deceptive character, that the esteem conferred upon him by the truly upright, conveys a distinction to which he has no right, and was given in ignorance of his real character. Had that been previously ascertained, every token of respect would have been withheld, and the culprit exposed to that detestation which his delinquency deserved.

2. Integrity and uprightness will preserve us from suspicion and fear, or the dread of detection. A deceitful man is haunted with this kind of dread; one deception is covered with another, injustice is concealed under falsehood, and one falsehood is employed to hide another, till he has no means of extricating himself from the folds and snares in which he is involved.

But how different with those who are guided and preserved by uprightness and integrity. They have no guilty secrets to keep, no interminable fear of contingencies that may expose to view the hidden things of darkness. They walk in the light, and come unto the light, that their deeds may be made manifest. 'The righteous are bold as a lion; but the wicked flee when no man pursueth.'

3. The virtues prayed for by the psalmist, will not only preserve from the fear of detection, but of course from the infamy consequent upon it. The deceptive character shrinks back at the approach of the wise and good; and sometimes, even the steady look of an upright man is sufficient to appal the guilty, and is equal in force to a lecture intended to remind him of his infamy.

Besides this, he labours under a perpetual disadvantage throughout his future life; for suppose he could divest himself of all concern for his character, yet his good actions, if he have any, will always be liable to suspicion. Hence he is enervated; the consciousness of past delinquencies enfeebles his efforts, and renders the task of future amendment unspeakably difficult, if not impracticable.

These considerations are sufficient to demonstrate the truth of that common adage, 'Honesty is the best policy.' There is no course so safe and ultimately beneficial, as that in which integrity and uprightness will infallibly conduct us. What was it that raised Daniel to such eminence in a foreign court, and that gave the monarch so much confidence in his administration, notwithstanding the obnoxiousness of his religious tenets? What but his well known probity and integrity. What established David on the throne, and defeated the machinations of Absalom? Not his courage or heroism, for they both failed him on this mournful occasion; but the general uprightness of his character, which was more than a counterpoise to all the blandishments of his rebellious son. It was this that inspired the public confidence, and formed the basis of his future aggrandizements.

In short, every man is of weight in society, in proportion to the probity and uprightness of his character. It is this that gives influence to opinion, and that enables a man to form a clear and satisfactory judgment on all questions of practical importance.

4. Integrity and uprightness will preserve us from bringing a reproach upon our christian profession. The men of the world are accurate judges of the value of these principles in secular concerns; and however defective they themselves may be, they have a beneficial influence upon their conduct; and their judgment of others is generally regulated by this standard of moral excellence. In this way it is, that the business of life is in great measure carried on; and the suspension of these principles would be the suspension of all confidence, and nearly all intercourse in human society. The man who is destitute of integrity and uprightness, not only wants the very elements of the christian character but is criminally ignorant of the rudiments of morality. If such persons have assumed the christian profession, it is plain they have only assumed it for pantomimic purposes. These are the men who betray Christ with a kiss; and say with Joab, Hail master, while they pierce him to the heart. Our Lord's command is, 'Let your light shine before men:' but how is this to be done. Certainly not by fraud, injustice, oppression, and deceit; but by letting our whole life be a constant exemplification of every christian virtue. It is sometimes said, that professing christians have less honour in civil engagements than other men; but if this be true, it only shows that they have not understood the genius of the gospel, and that their religion has spoiled them, instead of having improved their principles. It has introduced them it seems to a class of persons, where the cultivation of honour is but little appreciated, and where, being considered as a defective principle, it is totally abandoned. But if any man under the christian name has failed of this, and also of the practice of more transcendent virtues, he is still a stranger to the Just and Holy One.

5. Where integrity and truth are wanting, no prayer can come up with acceptance before God. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright; and if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God, and may go with humble boldness to his throne. David frequently appealed to the great Searcher of hearts to decide upon his integrity, not that he might recommend himself to the divine favour, but that he might be able to pray with more fervour and more confidence, and approach the fountain of all power, and the distributor of eternal justice, with more confirmed hope and expectation that he would vindicate his cause against his enemies. Psal. xvii. 26. This may teach us the necessity of integrity, uprightness, and truth in the whole of our deportment, in order to the acceptance of our prayers through the Mediator; and how vain and delusive is the hope, where these principles are abandoned, or but lightly regarded.

6. While David prayed to be thus preserved, he did not depend on his own strength, or on any of his attainments, but on the Lord, on whom he "waited" for protection and support, while he joined watchfulness to prayer, and learnt wisdom from past experience. And if David found it necessary to offer up the prayer in the text, notwithstanding his superior attainments, his rank and influence in society; how much more needful is it for us, who have not approached the standard of his piety and excellence. The temptations of the world will

prove too powerful for our unaided resistance, or the sincerest of our resolutions: let us therefore cultivate an abiding sense of the divine presence, avail ourselves of his strength, and flee to him in every moment of danger.

It is also of unspeakable importance that we respect and fulfil the royal law; of doing to others as we would they should do unto us, that our characters may have equal weight with men of honour, and those of genuine and distinguished piety; and that by well doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

THE GOSPEL COVENANT.

This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people.—Jeremiah xxxi. 33.

The glorious properties and holy effects of the gospel are here described and foretold, in contradistinction from the law of Moses. God had made a covenant with Israel, of which Moses was the mediator; but that did not secure the obedience of the people. He now therefore will make a new and better covenant, of which Christ is to be the mediator: and in this, the blessings of salvation are absolutely promised and made certain: ver. 31, 32.

(1) The gospel is called a "covenant," a new covenant, in distinction from the ceremonial law, which was also called a covenant. It is so denominated, to intimate the certainty of the things promised, for covenants are confirmed by an oath: hence most of God's solemn promises to his people are so called.

(2) It is a covenant made with "the house of Israel;" that is, the church of God, of which Israel was a type; yet not with the church immediately, but through the blood of the Mediator. The gospel is to us a matter of free promise: but in the hands of Christ it is a covenant with us, and on our behalf. He performs the conditions of it, and seals it with his blood. Making a covenant with any one is a sign of peace between the parties; and this new covenant is a sign of good will towards the house of Israel.

(3) Making it "after those days," means after the abolition of the ceremonial law, and so rendering the former covenant void. The new covenant was introduced by the ministry of John; more fully by that of Jesus; and was finally confirmed by his death. The authority of the ceremonial law ceased immediately after this event, and both Jews and gentiles were considered as under a new dispensation. This subject is fully stated in the epistle to the Hebrews.

(4) This new covenant implies that what the first could not secure

this is intended to accomplish ; and what that only shadowed forth this actually performs. The promise it contains was made after all other means failed, and when the house of Israel was gone into captivity. God had before written the law on tables of stone, and that did not succeed : now therefore he will write it on the heart, and the consequence is, that “he will be their God, and they shall be his people.”

The import of these promises, and the grace discovered in them, will form the subject of our meditation—

I. Consider the import of the promises.

The leading promise in the text, and that which lays the foundation of all the rest, is—“I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.”

In general observe, this new inscription is not intended to render the written law useless. Some have imagined that the law written in the heart was to become the rule of duty, and that the other is thereby superseded : but the moral law is of eternal obligation, and can never be made void.

Writing it in the heart denotes in general, an inward *conformity* to the divine law, and therefore it is not the law itself.

The law in the heart is at best imperfect, and therefore cannot be the rule of duty.

More particularly—

1. The law written in the heart is *not any new law*, but the same as was at first impressed on the soul of man, and afterwards engraven on tables of stone. Man was created after the likeness of God, in righteousness and true holiness : and was therefore perfectly conformed to the law in all its parts.

The law was defaced *by sin*, and another law introduced into our members, warring against the law of the mind ; so that man by nature is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be. Rom. viii. 7. Regeneration therefore consists in new engraving that law, and re-impressing the divine image on the soul of man, which sin had defaced.

2. By writing the law in the heart is meant a giving an *inward knowledge and approbation of it*, as it is expressed in another passage. Isaiah li. 7.

The heart is like the ark of the covenant, in which the tables of the law were kept ; it becomes the depository of this sacred trust.

Where the law is thus written, there is a knowledge of its purity, extent and spirituality ; an approbation of what God requires, and a devotedness to his service. Psal. xl. 8. Rom. vii. 22.

3. It includes a *supreme affection of the divine law*, and a delight in all its requirements.

That on which we have placed our affections is said to be in our hearts ; and there it is that God has fixed his law.

Before this work is begun, there is nothing but enmity to God and his government : afterwards it becomes our meat and drink to do his will.

The obedience rendered is not merely founded on the authority of the Lawgiver ; it is also excited by a view of the excellency and goodness of the law itself.

The law without commands, and the law within inclines to obedience ; so that such persons become as it were a law unto themselves.

4. It implies a *tenderness of conscience*, and a dread of sin; a quick discernment of its evil nature, and carefulness to avoid it. If the law be written in the heart, it will feel for God's honour; and like Eli, it will tremble for the ark when it seems to be in danger. This law is so deeply engraven that it shall never be obliterated; but its characters shall become increasingly legible, and a conformity to the mind and will of God a matter of continual delight.

Another promise is, "I will be their God."—The sacred Lawgiver forbids our seeking any other god; but we have all rejected him, and sought another portion. Now therefore he will himself become our portion, and will make the matter sure: we have been servants of sin, but he will make us servants of righteousness. Lev. xi. 4. Isai. xxvi. 13. Jer. vii. 23.

It is added, "They shall be my people." Israel had often promised to be his people; but they as often forsook him, and broke his covenant. Now they shall forsake him no more, nor will he forsake them forever. Heb. viii. 12. xiii. 5.

II. The grace discovered in these promises.

1. When God created man, he *made him upright*; nor could he make him otherwise. Man is now corrupt and fallen; and seeing the divine law is obliterated from his heart, God might never have written it there any more. It is of free and unmerited mercy that it is otherwise.

2. Our losing the moral image of God was a *voluntary act*: if we are without it, it is what we naturally choose. We love to be without God in the world, and desire not the knowledge of his ways. The carnal mind is enmity with God, and is not subject to his law. Great therefore is the grace that could restore the divine image to such a fallen and sinful creature.

3. It is still more that he should promise to be *our God*, and ensure to us such an unspeakable inheritance. For God to be our friend, secures every thing; and all good is comprehended in it.

INFERENCES.

(1) If ever we be saved, we see it must be by grace alone. We have nothing to glory in, for God is all in all.

(2) We learn from hence, wherein true religion consists; not in being made free from the law, or treating it with indifference; but in cherishing the highest esteem for its authority.

(3) The dreadful depravity of human nature, that should render an almighty work of grace necessary to restore us to a proper frame of mind, and that nothing short of our being new created should suffice.

(4) Unless the divine law be written in our heart, we have no part in the covenant, and no interest in the Saviour.

THE JOY OF LABOUR.

Whatsoever mine eyes desired, I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy: for my heart rejoiced in all my labour, and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on all the labour that I had laboured to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.—Ecclesiastes ii. 10, 11.

The book of Ecclesiastes was written in Solomon's old age, and contains his last thoughts on human life. We value the last thoughts of great men, much more of such a one as Solomon; especially as many of these thoughts are reflections on his own life, as well as on the folly of that of many others.

God seems to have raised him to the highest pitch of earthly happiness, that in him we might see what the world could do; and inspired him to write this book, that we might see the estimate of one who was competent to judge of this important question.

The text is not the language of a man who despises the world because he cannot obtain it, or of one who met with disappointments; but of one who had the greatest opportunity of trial, of one who did try it, and found it wanting. It is a discussion on that enquiry, ver. 3; "that he might see what was good for the sons of men which they should do under the heaven, all the days of their life." He searched creation for it, but found it not: his conclusion is given at the end of the book. "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." But confining our remarks to the text before us, we shall—

I. Take a brief view of the labours of human life, and the joy attending them.

1. *Activity itself* is gratifying to an ardent mind: a state of entire rest was never designed for man, not even in innocence. Solomon's description of the natural world, ch. i. 8, shows that indolence is inconsistent with the ends of our existence. Business is a pleasure; and many have been rendered miserable, who like the rich fool, have retired from it in order to enjoy themselves. Finding some sort of labour necessary, they have afterwards employed themselves in building, or planting; in rectifying what is wrong, or improving what is right, or have engaged in what is sinful and unprofitable.

2. *The ends accomplished* by labour afford joy to the heart: 'in all labour there is profit.' The occupation of the mind, in reading, in writing, and in study, encreases knowledge: and this becomes a rational satisfaction. Prov. ii. 2—5. The employment of both body and mind in business, or the necessary pursuits of life, tends to preserve health, and to secure those comforts and advantages on which the well being of man depends; and therefore yields a satisfaction, in some degree, like 'the joy of harvest.'

Particularly—

(1) There is a joy in *laying plans* and accomplishing them, especially if there are great difficulties to be surmounted. Neh. xii. 43.

(2) There is a joy in *recovering* what had been given up. The lost piece of silver, the finding of the lost sheep, the return of the prodigal son, and the building of the second temple amidst so much opposition, are all instances of this kind of satisfaction.

(3) There is great joy in effecting what has long been the *object of desire*; and the longer hope has been deferred, the more interesting does the attainment become.

(4) Labours of *public utility* especially, are attended with joy. A great navigator, like Columbus, would feel peculiar satisfaction in discovering a new world, though he himself might derive no immediate advantage from it: his name would be rendered immortal, and posterity would be greatly benefitted by the enterprise.

II. Consider the observation of the wise man on the labours of human life; that “all is vanity and vexation of spirit, and there is no profit under the sun.”

He does not mean to say that these labours are sinful: without them the world would stagnate. But there is an alloy attending them all, and we must soon be disinherited. Solomon’s expression on this occasion are very strong: “I despaired of all my labour—I hated it—I hated life;” ver. 17—20. There was some alloy or other mixed with it, and with every other enjoyment; there was ‘no profit’ worth the name, under the sun.

1. A great part of the labour of man is employed in *rectifying what is amiss*, or in supplying what is wanting: but this is endless work, ch. i. 15. The world and thousands of things in it are too crooked for us to make straight, and much of our labour is in this respect labour in vain.

2. Another part consists in *supplying what is defective*. This is wanting and that, but that which is wanting cannot be numbered. We shall never be able to get all things to our mind.

3. Part of the labour of human life consists in *laying plans*. But these are liable to continual disappointment, and we are often frustrated in our best schemes, either by the want of power or of wisdom to accomplish them: this also is ‘vanity.’

4. The principal object of human labour is the *attainment of our desires*; but these are often found afterwards to be utterly vain. We must die, and know not whether we shall leave the fruit of all our labour to a wise man or a fool, who may undo all the good we have been attempting: ver 19.

5. The best of all accomplishments is *wisdom*; but he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow; and so all is vanity.

6. All our labours *pass into oblivion*, and this therefore is another part of their vanity: ch. i. 11. What is become of all the labours of the ancients; where are all the cities, monuments, and writings, which they left behind! Where is Babylon, Nineveh, and even the

temple of Solomon?

There is also a period hastening, when all the works of men shall vanish like the baseless fabric of a vision, and leave not a wreck behind: and to us as individuals, the hour of death will be the close of all our labours under the sun.

III. Enquire whether there be not a kind of labour which is not accompanied with this alloy, and which will not end in vanity.

We are indeed expressly told, that our labour 'in the Lord' shall not be in vain. 1 Cor. xv. 58. Solomon also allows the same. Eccles. xii. 13.

1. There is a labour in cultivating and keeping *our own vineyard*, and a joy attending it, which is not inscribed with vanity. To know the will of God and do it, affords the highest satisfaction; and such shall abide forever.

It is a vanity attending all earthly labours and earthly wisdom, that death makes no difference between the wise and the foolish, and there is no remembrance of them after death.

But it is not so here; death itself is different, and there is a remembrance of them afterwards. Mal. iii. 16. There is meat for which we may labour, and which will endure to everlasting life; and a treasure which is better than 'the peculiar treasure of kings.' John vi. 27.

2. There is also a labour in which we may engage for *the glory of God and the good of mankind*, which is full of joy too, and on which vanity is not inscribed.

If we do but labour together with God, our work shall remain. There is a temple which shall survive the wreck of time: there is an inheritance that will not be left to fools.

The only way of being happy therefore, is to cultivate the garden of God.

THE TEN LEPERS.

And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, who stood afar off: and they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.—Luke xvii. 11—19.

The account given of our Lord's miracles, forms a most instructive part of the New Testament both as they furnish incontestible evidence of the divinity of his mission, and as they exemplify the conduct and character of that generation, amongst whom those miracles were wrought. We are apt indeed to imagine, had we lived at that eventful period, how very different would have been our conduct; but how vain are such thoughts. Do not all unregenerate men act on the same principle as those did who rejected the mission, and despised the authority of our Saviour? The difference is only circumstantial, and the depravity of human nature would lead to the same result.

The narrative before us states, that our Lord in passing through the confines of Galilee and Samaria was accosted by ten lepers, who stood at a distance, imploring his compassion. The leprosy was a disease which the Jews regarded with abhorrence: every person afflicted with it was compelled to dwell in a separate house, and doomed to perpetual solitude: no one would associate with a leper, but such as were themselves the unhappy participants of that disease. The ten men who now excited attention, had given themselves up to a kind of mendicancy, wandering from place to place in quest of sustenance. They "stood afar off," not presuming to make a nearer approach, on account of the infectious nature of their malady. There were also certain miraculous symptoms attendant on the leprosy, which induced the Jews to consider it as a signal punishment for some unknown sin; and being deep and inveterate, polluting and infectious, it became the emblem of our spiritual maladies, and their fatal consequences. Application being made to the Saviour for his mercy, he directed them to go to the priests, whose office it was to take cognizance of the disease, and to pronounce the party clean or unclean. Lev. xviii. 14. All were miraculously healed as they went; and one of them, the least likely, being a Samaritan, returned to offer thanks. The appearance of our Saviour was not such as to attract attention, or inspire fear and dread; yet this Samaritan "fell at his feet," overcome with reverence and awe. The

rest ungratefully neglected their benefactor; but this poor stranger received his commendation and his blessing.

From this instructive account the following observations may be derived—

1. It is usual with most, if not all men, to address their supplications to God in seasons of calamity.—Prayer is the voice of nature: all men despair of safety, if it is not to be obtained from above, and even pagans themselves have no hope from any other quarter. When the heathen mariners were visited with a threatening storm, in consequence of Jonah's disobedience to the divine command, they admonished the insensible prophet, saying, 'What meanest thou, oh sleeper! Arise and call upon thy God, that we perish not.' The Israelites in bondage cried unto the Lord, and others in similar circumstances have done the same. Even infidels, forgetting their principles in a season of distress, have given vent to the instinctive cries of nature, and called upon the name of the Lord. No inference therefore, affecting character, can be drawn from this sort of involuntary devotion, which while it demonstrates a secret conviction of the pervading presence of the Deity, and of the need of his interposition, leaves the moral state of the party wholly undecided.

2. Though it is natural for all men to call upon God, when overtaken with calamity, yet it is common for them to forget their obligations, after mercy has been experienced.—This indeed is a charge which very few can escape. In the present instance ten lepers were healed, and only one returned to offer thanks. God has delivered us from affliction and from death, in more instances than one; and yet we have not returned like this Samaritan. How frequently has it happened, that the more any one has been assured of his restoration to health and comfort, the more cold and negligent has been his gratitude, the more lax and limited his obedience, bearing no proportion to the deliverance that has been wrought. When God delivered the children of Israel from the Egyptian yoke, they 'sang his praises' for a few days, 'but soon forgot his works.' This circumstance is deplored by the sacred historian, and written in the Scriptures for a lamentation. And alas, how many have cried to God in their affliction, and vowed to serve him in a course of holy obedience, who are no sooner recovered than they forget it all. It is no wonder however, that persons whose meditations are on any thing rather than God in a time of health and prosperity, should warp back and return to their bias, as soon as the foreign attraction is withdrawn, and the pressure of adversity removed. They have always considered God as an enemy, and therefore his favours are regarded with suspicion or indifference, and fail to awaken those devout and grateful sentiments which they are so naturally adapted to excite. It would be well however, if the servants of God could themselves be exempted from the charge; but though they are so in some good degree, yet there is still a lamentable deficiency, and their devotion bears no adequate proportion to their obligations. Like Hezekiah they too often become vain, and their hearts are lifted up within them. *Isai. xxxix. 1.*

3. The text suggests that there are some happy exceptions to this general forgetfulness of God, here and there a poor Samaritan who falls down before him and adores.—Like the leper, some are brought to God

by means of affliction, and they devote themselves to him in perpetual obedience. In seeking to be healed of the leprosy, he was cured of a worse disease; the leprosy of sin was healed, and by "faith he was made whole." Happy is the issue of sanctified affliction, and happy those who thus 'pay their vows unto God, in the presence of all his people.' Truly good men will coincide with the divine intentions: they know that God has their ultimate good in view, in all his dispensations, and that he designs to lead them to himself as the source of all their blessedness.

4. The example of the Samaritan stranger, in being the only one out of ten to return and offer thanks, reflects in awful colours the general depravity of human nature.—We may wonder at the stupidity which could be insensible to such miracles of mercy, and to so great a deliverance; but men exhibit the same character to the present day. Multitudes who are indulged with the best advantages, either feel no sentiments of love and gratitude, or none that are effective. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: man is the only ingrate in the whole creation.

5. How utterly unavailing are mere external privileges, and yet how aggravated their abuse.—The nine ungrateful lepers were probably Israelites, from whom better things might have been expected: the man who returned to offer thanks was a stranger, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel: yet he alone embraces and adores the Saviour. Thus we still see those who are less favoured with spiritual advantages effectually awakened, and brought from the east and from the west to sit down in the kingdom of God, while the children of the kingdom are cast out. The last continue to be first, and the first last. Let no one therefore value himself on his external advantages: if not diligently and faithfully improved, they will only procure the greater disappointment and condemnation.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) What a mass of evil is included in the sin of ingratitude! It is a virtual denial of the divine goodness, and all the obligations which that goodness confers. It is treating God and his infinite beneficence with contempt.

With what sentiments then have you estimated the prolongation of life? Has the multiplication of days and years been attended with a successive and corresponding flow of gratitude, and praise and love; or has mercy ceased to be mercy, because you possess it in such rich abundance?

Where are the resolutions and the vows made in affliction; the desires after God and holiness then so ardently expressed?

(2) Recollect how much real enjoyment is lost by insensibility. Gratitude touches one of the finest springs of our nature; it furnishes a song in the house of our pilgrimage, and inspires the whole family around the throne. It was the resolution of the royal psalmist, 'I will sing of thy mercy;' and in God's temple, all his people 'abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness.' But insensibility deprives us of all this extacy and praise, and of all meetness for the service of God on earth and in heaven.

(3) Where no suitable return is made for mercies received, God is robbed of his glory, and the wise and holy ends of his beneficence are in effect defeated. The present is intended as the scene of moral action; afflictions and deliverances are adapted to refine and elevate our nature, and to conduct us to the fountain of eternal life and blessedness; but if unaffected with the displays of infinite goodness and mercy, how just that we should have our portion with the unthankful and unholy.

(4) Let us be deeply humbled under a sense of our baseness, and let past ingratitude provoke to renewed praise. Did we but record the innumerable mercies and deliverances which God has wrought for us, how would our afflictions 'work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

That I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me.—Romans i. 12.

The communion of saints was esteemed of such importance amongst early christians, as to make it an article of faith; and where the spirit of it is preserved, it still forms a charming part of the christian religion.

Our text gives us a brief description of it. Paul longed to see the christians at Rome, having as yet only heard of them by report. When going up to Jerusalem, he observed, he went not knowing the things that should befall him there, save that in every place bonds and afflictions awaited him. He wished to go to Rome, but little thought of being sent thither as a prisoner. In this epistle, written from Corinth, he proposed taking them in his way to Spain, and promised himself much satisfaction in the interview. His hope was, that their mutual faith would be a comfort to each other.

I. Enquire what there is in the faith of ministers to comfort private christians.

When christians see their minister, they expect to hear something concerning "the faith;" and Paul takes it for granted it would be so with these christians at Rome.

Now there are three things in the faith of the ministers of the gospel, which tend to comfort the minds of the godly—

1. Its being *scriptural and decided*. If the faith which we preach were antiscritptural, it might comfort the sinner and the hypocrite, but not the real christian; to him it would be matter of grief.

If we dealt in speculations, it might amuse and interest an ingenious mind; but there would be no solid food for the godly.

Now the apostles were decided: they spoke what they believed and

were assured of, and had not followed cunningly-devised fables; and it is this in the ministry of the word now, which affords comfort.

To see a minister decided on scriptural grounds, speaking the things of which he himself has been fully assured, is to see a guide who is well acquainted with his way, or a pilot who is conversant with his chart.

The opposite of this is distressing. To see a guide stumbling in the dark, not knowing truth from error, but who now tells you this is the way and then that, and is at a loss to know what he should believe, must excite fear and distrust, and not comfort.

But Paul's gospel was not yea and nay; but yea and amen in Christ Jesus. 2 Cor. i. 17—20.

2. Its being given them not for themselves only, but *as a public trust to be imparted*, renders it a source of comfort to believers.

In this respect Paul considered himself as "a debtor," both to the wise and the unwise: ver. 14.

He was entrusted with the 'unsearchable riches of Christ,' not for his own use merely, but that he might proclaim them among the gentiles as an almoner. Eph. iii. 8.

He himself was poor, yet making many rich: he was afflicted and persecuted, in order that he might comfort others. 2 Cor. i. 6. vi. 10.

3. Its being a *living principle in their own souls*; the truth on which they live, and have ventured their own eternal all. 1 Tim. iv. 6.

Without an experimental acquaintance with the truth, there would be very little to edify and comfort others, whatever might be our attainments and gifts in other respects.

Its coming from the heart makes it interesting to the hearts of others: hence it is that an experimental ministry yields comfort to real christians, and no other ministry can do it. 1 Thess. i. 5, 6.

II. Notice what there is in the faith of private christians to comfort the ministers of Christ.

It is necessary that they should receive comfort, as well as impart it: and the faith of christians tends to do this, and that for the following reasons—

1. It furnishes them with *sentiments and feelings* in their preaching, which nothing else could do.

A believing, spiritual, attentive, and affectionate auditory, whose souls are engaged, tend to inspire thought and feeling in the preacher, which no previous preparations could excite.

So on the contrary, when unbelief, carelessness, or conceit appears, it tends to chill the soul, which is like a vessel confined in port for want of a gale. Heb. v. 11.

2. In the faith of private christians also we see the *travail of our Redeemer's soul*, and this gives us comfort.

If we love him, we cannot but rejoice in the success of his gospel. Every other consideration is of very inferior importance compared with this, however agreeable our circumstances may be.

3. In it we see also the *fruit of our own labours*; an answer to many prayers, and to many endeavours for the good of others.

This is highly encouraging to a faithful minister; and without it he spends his strength in vain. Isai. xlix. 4. Gal. iv. 19. 1 Thess. ii. 19.

4. In it we see the *pledge of your salvation*; and in proportion as we love your souls, this must comfort us. As fellow creatures, as friends, as the relatives of dear friends, we cannot but love you: to see therefore the evidence of your conversion and salvation, is our highest enjoyment and reward. 1 Thess. ii. 8. 3 John 4.

III. What there is in the common faith of both to comfort one another.

Common blessings are the best of blessings; and those blessings which ministers possess, not as ministers, but as christians in common with the rest, are the best of all. What Paul desired for his own soul, is common to the meanest christian. Phil. iii. 8.

Now there are three things in the common faith of both ministers and christians, which tend to their mutual comfort—

1. *Its unity.* Those who have never seen each other's faces in the flesh, yet when they come to converse together, will soon find their hearts to be one. Paul had often felt thus, even when at a distance from christian friends. Col. ii. 5. But he would feel much more from a personal interview; and hence he longed to see these believing Romans, that he might be comforted by "the mutual faith" of one another.

2. The *interesting nature of the truth believed*, has this tendency.

'This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—God was manifest in the flesh—God so loved the world.'—

It is from the belief of this gospel, that there is now no condemnation. Hence we become the sons of God, and hence the hope of eternal life. These are things of the utmost importance; and being such, like a company of strangers who find themselves all embarked in the same ship, and going together, the mutual belief of them affords mutual comfort.

3. The promised *presence of Christ*, which attends such meetings of the godly for communion with each other, furnishes another source of mutual enjoyment. It is only where Christ meets with his people, that real hapiness can be found.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) Learn the necessity of *faith in Christ*, in order to christian communion. Unbelievers, or mere nominal christians, possess no fitness for it: there is neither any bond of union, nor any medium of receiving or imparting christian comfort.

(2) The necessity of *communicating* faith, in order to enjoy the benefit of christian fellowship. That kind of discourse which tends to explain and render truth interesting, is of importance in promoting both the union and comfort of the godly.

(3) If the fellowship of saints on earth be so desirable, what will it be *in heaven*; where no darkness will be felt, no discords, no calamities, no painful seperations shall take place any more!

INSENSIBILITY AMIDST NATIONAL MERCIES.

They shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.—Luke xix. 44.

The calamities of Jerusalem are mentioned as a singular monument of divine displeasure, and it was foretold by our Lord that they should be such as never were witnessed, either before or since. Matt. xxiv. 21.

Their own historian, who relates the fact as it occurred, has fully shown the fulfilment of the prophecy. All nations have said as it were concerning it, 'What meaneth the heat of this great anger? Wherefore hath the Lord done this unto his land?' Our text contains the answer.

I. Consider the nature of Jerusalem's visitation, and their insensibility under it.

God's judgments are often called his 'visitations;' but here it means his mercy, particularly sending his Son, as in Luke vii. 46. This also is the meaning of ver. 42: 'the things which belong to their peace.'

The Lord is said to 'visit' his people, when he raised up Moses to be their deliverer, as Joseph said he would do after his death. But a greater than Moses is here. When after a famine the Lord sent them bread, he is said to 'visit' them. Ruth i. 6. But here he feeds them with the bread of life. The sending of the gospel among the Gentiles is also so called, Acts xv. 14: but as yet the Saviour was chiefly confined to the Jews, the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Let us more particularly notice the peculiar mercies with which the Jews were at this time visited.—

1. They had such a *preacher* sent to them as no other people ever had—God's own Son: never man spake like him. Heb. ii. 3.

2. His doctrine and mission were confirmed by *such evidences* as were never before exhibited to the world. Heb. ii. 4. A continued series of miracles attested that he was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God.

3. The *first fruits* of his death were gathered from amongst them, even though they had been his murderers. Luke xx. 47. Acts xiii. 46.

Yet to all this they were totally insensible: a price was in their hands, but they had no heart to use it. The Light shined in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not: he came unto his own, but his own received him not. They made light of his salvation, of the feast which his love prepared, and to which they were so pressingly invited.

II. Apply the subject to ourselves.

We have our days of visitation as well as they—

1. *As a nation* we have had a large portion of God's visitations of the Gentiles. Acts xv. 14. The gospel was preached in our land at an early period. When other nations were lost in popish dark-

God visited us with the blessings of the Reformation. Bible has had an extensive circulation amongst us, while totally unknown to many of the nations upon earth.

Liberty of conscience has been long enjoyed, the gospel has had free course, and been abundantly glorified.

Yet may it not be said of the general body of the people of this land, as it was of Jerusalem of old, 'They know not the day of their visitation.' And as Jerusalem's sin was measured by her privileges, so must ours.

We speak of other nations as if their wickedness was unparalleled. They may indeed be like Tyre and Sidon, and even as Sodom and Gomorrha; but if they be, we are as Bethsaida and Chorazin. And if God should deal with us as he did with them, how awfully applicable would the text be to our case.

2. Many of our *congregations* have also enjoyed a large share of God's merciful visitations.

He has sent us many burning and shining lights, and a season of rest and peace.

These are the gifts of the Mediator, that the Lord God might dwell amongst us; and he has indeed dwelt amongst us. Psal. lxxviii. 18.

There have also been times of revival; and when death has removed the fathers of the church, others have been raised up in their stead, and we have called them blessed.

Yet how little have christians in general been aware of their mercies: and how little has God been glorified in these times of visitation.

3. The same is true of *individuals*: we have each had our days of visitation.

The first and greatest of all is the good news of salvation, or Christ's coming into the world to save sinners. A way is now open for the consistent exercise of mercy to the unworthy: displeased as God is with us, he is well pleased with his Son, and has invited us to return to him in his name, with the promise of gracious acceptance.

Whether we know it or not, this is good news; and to embrace it, is the great thing which belongs to our peace.

God has also invited us, by various motives, to provoke our acceptance of his salvation.

Precious promises, interesting examples are set before us, to compel our compliance.

He has also led us to the grave's mouth, and brought us up again.

Insensibility amidst such profusion of benefits, will not only leave us without excuse, but aggravate our final doom.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF FOLLOWING CHRIST.

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.—John viii. 12.

There were many pretended lights in the world, as there are now, and many who followed those wandering stars: but Christ is the origin of all true intelligence, the fountain of light and life to all his people.

Like the lesser planets, they borrow all their light from him; while he alone is as the mid-day sun,

I. Contemplate the character which our Lord assumes: "I am the light of the world."

The Jews objected to it, and do still object, ver. 13: and if he were a mere prophet, as some have said, and only a man, though inspired, the assumption in the text would indeed be inadmissible.

Our Lord not only distinguished himself from all false lights, and false prophets, but from all the servants of God that ever came before him, as in John i. 7—9.

They only shone with borrowed rays: his light is original and underived. Their light was confined to time and place: his is universal, 'the light of the world.' Jews and gentiles, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, all derive their light from him: those under the Old Testament, and those under the New.

More particularly—

1. Christ's being the light of the world means *what he is to others, as revealed in the gospel.*

The divine nature is sometimes expressed by this term, as when it is said, 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all:' but here it denotes what Christ is to the world.

If the light had been confined to his personal appearance, the sun would have been set when he left the earth. Instead of this, the light shone still brighter after his ascension than before: and it shall continue to shine, still more and more, unto the perfect day.

2. Christ as revealed in the gospel, sheds a light on *the character and designs of God.*

But for him, we should have known but little of his moral attributes: it is the Son that has 'declared him,' and it is in his face that we behold the glory of the Lord. John i. 18. xvii. 26. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

By the law written on our hearts we might have known something of the justice of God, and seen the terror of his majesty, sufficient to inspire us with dread, at the thought of appearing before him: but this would have been all. Whereas now, we see him gracious and glorious, a just God and yet a Saviour; glorified in the highest, and sending peace on earth.

3. The revelation of Christ casts a light on *the former dispensations.*

How dark and inexplicable would have been the types and shadows of the law, the prophecies and providences attending the Jewish church, had they not been followed by the doctrine of the cross.

The disciples themselves were all in the dark, till Jesus opened their understandings, and expounded to them all things written in the law and the prophets concerning himself. Luke xxiv. 25—27.

4. The doctrine of Christ affords the clearest discovery of *the way of a sinner's salvation*, so that it is now traced as with a sunbeam.

That faithful saying of Paul's, 'that Christ came into the world to save sinners,' casts more light on this subject than all the labours of man could possibly have effected.

Philosophy did nothing towards it. Even old testament believers saw only as through a glass darkly: but in the gospel we behold it all with open face.

Now, how clearly

is the way of life revealed. The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth : and in thy heart : believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

II. Consider the blessedness of those who follow him : "they shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

1. 'Walking' implies that *life is a journey*. We are not at home, but travelling to another world. There are many ways that lead to death, and but one that leads to endless life : hence the great importance of having the true light to guide us.

2. The promise implies that *many walk in darkness*, even all that follow not this light. They go on stumbling, not knowing the way, nor whither they are going : all is doubtfulness, and dreadful uncertainty.

3. Those who follow Christ shall have *the light of life*, even that which not only illuminates, but 'cheers and quickens them along the road.

'Following' Christ supposes our believing on him. It is to follow him as the Shepherd of the flock, as disciples follow their Master ; or rather, as a traveller who sees the light and follows after it, like the children of Israel who were guided by the pillar of fire through the wilderness.

(1) Compare their state with that of *the heathen world*. They know nothing of the way, nor whither they are going ; but vainly imagine that when they leave the world, they shall transmigrate into other bodies. But Christians know the way. John xiv. 3, 4.

(2) Compare their state with that of merely *nominal christians*, who know not the way, nor whither they are going, notwithstanding the objective light with which they are surrounded.

(3) In comparison of such as *follow Christ partially*, and not wholly, they may be said not to walk in darkness. Some are blown about with every wind of doctrine, and are always at sea, without a compass or a guide.

In order to follow this light, we must be convinced of our own ignorance and need of a guide. Pride and unbelief have darkened the understanding, and those who think they see are made blind. John ix. 39—41.

IMPORTANCE OF LOVE TO GOD.

But if any man love God, the same is known of him,—
1 Corinthians viii. 3.

This verse is to be considered as a part of a long parenthesis, comprehending several cautions and advices to the infant church at Corinth, and intended to suggest proper modes of conduct to christians dwelling in the midst of heathen idolators.

Our object will be to illustrate and explain the nature of love to God, and its tendency to ascertain an interest in the divine favour.

I. Consider the character here denominated as loving God.

1. This great principle is essential to every subordinate exercise of religion, for except we love God, we cannot expect to please him in any thing we do.

What induced Enoch to walk with God, but an ardent affection for his character, arising from a perception of his moral beauty and excellence. And this attachment was accompanied with a sense of his acceptance, 'for he had this testimony that he pleased God.'

Walking before him, and in holy fellowship with him, and seeking to please him in all things, is the necessary consequence of this attachment; for it is natural for us to desire the presence and to seek intercourse and communion with the object of our affections; and love to God will have this effect.

2. This principle will induce a spirit of obedience to him, as the great and only Potentate. It will teach us to recognize the relation in which we stand to God, as children to a parent, and as subjects to a prince. Hence said our Lord to his disciples, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.' Love is an active operate principle, studious of manifesting its acquiescence in the will, and of testifying its submission to the authority of its great object. Hence the apostle John says, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments:' and by this criterion the sincerity of our love must be decided.

3. Love to God will teach us to submit to trying dispensations, and to all the appointments of a wise and holy providence. It will not permit us to call in question any part of God's government, or to indulge a doubt respecting the rectitude of his proceedings. The language of filial affection is, 'Father, not my will, but thine be done.'

4. The same principle will engage us to effective efforts towards the enlargement of Christ's kingdom. To this end we shall be assiduous in the cultivation of our talents, in the improvement of our time, in the acquisition of knowledge; and shall freely and constantly devote our selves, our property, our influence, and our all to the service of the great Redeemer.

II. The state of that person who thus evinces his love to God: "the same is known of him."

1. He is approved of God, who infallibly ascertains the principle by which he is actuated, and judges him to be well affected. We are obliged to judge of men's motives by their actions, but the divine Being judges of actions by their motives. He discerns and dissects the intents of the heart, and determines with infallible precision the quality of motives.

2. The divine Being not only discriminates his affectionate and obedient subjects from the rest of mankind; they also become the objects of his approbation and choice, and are known and loved of him in return for the affection they bear to his holy name. The great Ruler of

the universe recognizes all men ; but he who loves God is known as the object of complacency and delight.

Whatever theological system he may have formed, amidst the various subdivisions of the christian church, or whatever the mode of worship he may have adopted, the love of God consecrates him as a temple for the Holy Ghost, and he shall stand as an eternal monument of grace, while the mere speculatist in religion will be scattered and blown away like chaff before the wind.

(1) Let this subject then afford encouragement to the weak but sincere believer. The moral condition of such is not to be judged of by their intellectual powers, or natural acquirements ; for these are not the criterion of true wisdom. Many christians doubt of their safety because they possess so little light, are so weak in understanding, and deficient in recollection.

Light is good as the medium of action, but it is only so when we use it to beneficial purposes. It may be perverted into an evil ; and if we possess it without love, it becomes the aliment of the worst poison, and diffuses its baleful influences throughout the whole of the moral system.

(2) This subject teaches us what we should chiefly aspire after in religion. It shows us the nothingness of mere speculative knowledge, and that 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' If we read the Scriptures or any other religious book, or attend upon the ministry of the gospel, without being furnished with motives to obedience, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

The Corinthians indulged in much self-complacency, because of their superior knowledge and attainments ; but the apostle informs them it is not for these that any one is approved of God : " but if any man love God, the same is known of him."

(3) Let this subject teach us, that as love to God is the rule by which he regulates his judgment of character, so it ought to be ours in forming a similar estimate.

Many of the humble and the lowly who are now neglected or despised for want of talent, give notwithstanding the most unequivocal proof of love to God ; and will one day be raised to honour and glory, while mere men of talent will perish forgotten and unknown.

(4) Let it teach us the importance of cultivating this sacred principle, of keeping alive in our own breasts this fire of holy love, that it may purify us from all our dross and all our sin.

Love is the element of heaven, and tends more than any other attainment to meeten us for the kingdom of God.

PAST AFFLICTIONS A PLEA FOR FUTURE MERCY.

Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.—Psalm xc. 15.

Moses appears to have offered up this prayer on occasion of the doom passed upon Israel in the wilderness. Num. xiv. 28—35. In it we see much of the plaintive, yet much faith and cleaving to the Lord, with earnest desires for the prosperity of the church. Having been forbidden to enter the holy land, and to dwell there, they make up their loss in God: ver. 1, 2. Seeing also that their days were to be short and few, they desire to spend them in wisdom's ways: ver. 12. And though doomed to die in the wilderness, they pray for spiritual prosperity.

The text is one of those petitions, in which past afflictions are turned into a plea for future mercy. Its language implies that it is usual with God, in dealing with his people here, to balance evil with good, or to set the day of prosperity over against the day of adversity.

I. Enquire what ground there is for this plea in the ordinary dispensations of providence.

If the Lord had dealt with sinners upon the footing of justice, there would have been nothing but evil all our days; but through the mediation of Christ, it has been mixed with mercy. The alternate changes of day and night, summer and winter, are not more fixed as the ordinary course of things, than the mixture of mercy and judgment in God's dealings with his people. Of this we have various examples in the Scriptures.

1. Much evil attended *the family of Adam* after the fall; but it was not evil unmixed. He had a son, their first-born son, but he was very wicked: he had also a godly son, but his brother slew him.

Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and saw little else but evil. Yet it did not end so: for by and by, God gave him

another son instead of Abel; and now the scene is changed, and all is light and joy again. Gen. iv. 25, 26.

2. The *destruction of the old world* was an evil time, and all the while the ark was building; yet the Lord afterward made the new world glad. Noah's offering was accepted, and a covenant was

made with him for all flesh; so that he was made glad according to the years wherein he had seen evil.

3. The sentence passed upon *the Israelites* in the wilderness, to which this psalm refers, is an instance of a similar kind. It was an awful time when God overthrew them, so that three and twenty thousand fell in one day. 1 Cor. x. 8. Yet the people that were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness: they were healed, and their hearts were made glad. Jer. xxxi. 2.

4. There was great *distress in Israel* in the times of Elijah and

Elisha, by the wars of Hazael king of Assyria, who oppressed them and took them captive; and this perhaps was intimated by the wind, the earthquake, and the fire which the prophet witnessed in the mountain. But these terrific appearances issued in a small voice, which followed afterwards.

There were also great troubles in Israel during the times of the Judges, and till the close of the reign of David: but after all this, there was peace in Solomon's time. Psal. lx. 1—4.

5. The afflictions of the world and the church, during the rise and reign of *the four monarchies*, when there was nothing but wars, and the overturning of nations; yet all issued in the coming kingdom of Christ. Ezek. xxi. 27.

6. Such also it is foretold will be the result of all the evils attendant on the destruction of *the fourth beast*, or the kingdom of antichrist. It will be followed by the universal spread of the gospel, by which the Lord will make his people glad, according to the days in which they have been afflicted, and the years in which they have seen evil.

II. Apply the subject to ourselves, and notice the cases in which we may derive comfort from it.

1. There are *individuals* who may adopt the language of the text.

Some have borne much affliction, and seen much evil; indeed there are but few who have lived long in the world but could make up a large account of troubles they have met with, though there are some whose trials have been more severe.

They have had, it may be a large portion of bodily affliction, and this may afford a plea for alleviation; or if not, for spiritual support and comfort under it. Prayer will be heard, and God's grace will be sufficient, though the thorn be not removed.

Others have had a deal of mental affliction, much fear and dejection about the state of their souls. But be not cast down: flee to Jesus with your trouble, and all will be well.

2. There are also some *families* who may adopt this language.

They have met with a deal of trouble, and hardly see any thing else but trouble. Some unconverted relative or undutiful child, some losses or disappointments following hard upon one another, have embittered many of the years of their life.

But which ever of these may happen to be your lot, there is still hope in God, if you truly love and fear him.

He can make you glad, can clear the darkest sky, and give you day for night; troubles give a plea, and even a hope for this.

3. There are ills and evils which attend *christian societies*.

The loss or removal of useful members the affliction and death of a faithful minister the want of success in the work of the Lord.

Yet each of these may furnish a plea like that in our text; and there have been numerous instances in which the Lord has revived and prospered his cause in such societies, according to the days in which they have been afflicted.

4. The *church of God at large* has seen much evil hitherto, in comparison of what it will hereafter see.

Its numbers have been few and despised; they have often been persecuted and reproached, and

have had but little success; so that they have been ready to say, we have wrought no deliverance in the earth, neither are the inhabitants of the world fallen. Yet each of these troubles furnishes a plea in prayer, and may be urged before the mercy seat. Better days are before us, and the Lord shall yet build up Zion, and comfort all her waste places. Psal. cii. 13, 14. Isai. lv. 13.

5. *All our years* that are allotted us in this life are in some degree, years of evil; for man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

Yet this furnishes a plea for another and a better world.

Our days on earth are days of mourning and sorrow. We grieve for departed friends, and surviving friends must soon grieve for us. These are the days in which God afflicts us, and the years wherein we shall see evil.

But he will hereafter make us glad accordingly, if our sorrows be but sanctified. Our joys also will be increased by the remembrance of our former sorrows, and we shall bless the day that exercised both our patience and our faith.

Only let us see that our afflictions lead us to the Saviour, and they will work for us an exceeding weight of glory. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

What indeed are afflictions, mixed with such a hope, when compared with the sorrows of the ungodly. Rom. viii. 18.

THE JOY OCCASIONED BY EARLY PIETY.

I rejoiced greatly, that I found of thy children walking in the truth.—2 John 4.

This epistle is addressed to a pious lady and her family, ver. 1; to a religious family, where John used sometimes to visit; and on some of these occasions he found that some of her children were converted.

There is a great delicacy in the mode of expression. He does not say all her children, but some of them, and that without using any specific term. He does not censure the rest, but he commends those who were converted, and expresses his joy on their behalf.

I. Observe the description given of their piety: "they were found walking in the truth."

1. Enquire *what is truth*? This is a term by which the gospel is denoted. There are various truths besides what is contained in the Scriptures, but that is emphatically stiled the truth.

There is such a thing as *philosophic* truth, a true and false system of philosophy, and men have been at great pains to find it out; but it is of little importance for us to understand it, though it is very well as an accomplishment.

We may be able to ascertain the respective magnitude and distances of the planets: and when we have done this, what follows? Why, nothing.

There is also *moral* truth, which consists in integrity, uprightness, and the corresponding virtues; and this is highly useful in society.

But it has nothing to do with the way of salvation: a man may possess much of this, as well as of the former, and yet be a stranger to the truth as it is in Jesus.

Distinct from these, there is also *religious* truth. The Scriptures afford us much important information concerning God and man, heaven and hell, this world and another, and on many other subjects; but it is not every religious truth that is called 'the truth.'

The *gospel* itself, or the evangelical system, is so denominated. Hence it is summed up in such modes of speech as these: 'this is a faithful saying; that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son—I preach unto you the gospel, how that Christ died for our sins.' 1 Cor. xv. 1—4. 1 Tim. i. 15. 1 John v. 11.

2. What is it to *walk in truth*? This supposes that there is something practical in it. Many have the truth, and know it, but do not walk in it. To walk in truth is to be under its influence; it is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation; "to walk after his commandments," ver. 6; to walk in love with his people, and to walk before God.

'Walking' stands opposed to indifference and inaction. It is also the opposite of walking in error and in sin, or of walking according to the flesh, and according to the course of this world.

3. What is it to *be found* walking in the truth? This supposes that their religion was visible as well as active; it was such as might be seen and observed by others. True religion cannot be long concealed; it will show itself wherever it exists. Acts iv. 13.

Now when John visited this pious family, he observed some things among them which occasioned great joy. He "found them" reading the Scriptures, seeking retirement; saw them tender, and moved with heavenly things. He also beheld the influence of truth in their conduct towards their superiors, and all about them. He not only observed them to be attentive hearers of the word in public, but when he followed them to their dwelling, he "found" that they carried their religion home with them.

How different is the case in many instances. We see persons affected under the word, but afterwards find them in the world, careless, thoughtless, and carnally minded.

II. The joy which this occasioned: "I rejoiced greatly"—

Joy is produced only on great occasions. Many things may give us pleasure, peace, and comfort, but very few things afford us joy; for that is the overflowing of the heart. There was great joy at the building of the second temple, and also on the ascension of the Saviour; but these were unusual events, and of the highest importance.

Yet John rejoiced "greatly" on finding a part of this family converted to God. He was exceedingly filled with joy, even to transport, as if he had found an inestimable prize, or the pearl of great price.

Like the father of the prodigal, who made a great feast and said, This my son was dead, but is alive again.

1. Because they were "children" or *young people*. The conversion of any sinner is matter of joy, but the conversion of some is so more especially; and there is a great difference in the joy which these instances of mercy occasion. We rejoice in the conversion of an aged sinner, chiefly on his own account; to see him saved from hell, just as he was going down to the grave. Otherwise there is but little occasion for joy: there is nothing left for God but the mere dregs of life, the blind and the lame for sacrifice. But in the conversion of young people, what do we see? We see in them the friends of Jesus when we are dead; the pillars of the church, and in some of them the angel face of some future minister of Christ, who shall be the means of converting many souls that may follow us to glory.

2. They were *the children of a friend*, whom John loved: "thy children" walking in the truth. There is a pleasure in seeing young people of any description brought to receive the truth, even the children of strangers: this is matter of joy, as prey delivered out of the hands of the terrible. But there is a peculiar pleasure in seeing the children of those whom we love converted; those with whom we have taken sweet counsel, and walked together to the house of God; they are dear to them, and therefore dear to us. And though grace is not hereditary, yet we generally see it prevail in families that fear God, and the children of such are generally converted, sooner or later.

3. Because it is *in answer to many prayers*. How often has that prayer in effect been presented: 'Oh that Ishmael might live before thee!' Some godly parents have warned and instructed their children, without any good effect; and prayed, without seeing any answer. They have perhaps gone to heaven and left them unconverted.

In how many instances have their dying beds been rendered unhappy by the thought of leaving their children without God in the world. While their eyes have beamed with hope, with respect to themselves, they have been filled with anguish at the thought of some unhappy child to be left behind. But sometimes their prayers, which have come up as a memorial before God, have been answered long after they are gone to heaven; and others live to see their children converted. Nor can we forbear, with John, to rejoice greatly in so important and desirable an event.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) We see here the *discriminating* nature of the grace of God. All the children of this 'elect lady' had no doubt the same advantages, the same religious instruction; and yet we do not find that all were alike benefitted by them. Some of them only were 'found walking in the truth;' and there are some that will not be reclaimed.

(2) Yet there is *encouragement* for continued prayer and exertion. It may leave convictions that may never be fully erased, but which may follow them till they overtake them in an hour of affliction.

(5) What *reproof* does the pious example of young people give to those who are more advanced in life—to see them enter into the kingdom of heaven, and you left out!

THE SCORNER'S CONTEMPT OF RELIGION.

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God.—Psalm x. 4.

It was the frequent lot of David to meet with trouble; and here we find him complaining of persecutors, and making his appeal to God: ver. 1. He then describes the character of the wicked in various particulars, and our text is a part of that description. Here we see that what human nature was in David's time, that it is still: they are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. Psalm xiv. 1.

I. Consider that to which the wicked are said to be averse, namely, seeking the Lord.

The expression, "seeking the Lord," is often used as a description of true religion. The godly are said to be a generation that seek the face of the God of Jacob; and such are encouraged to rejoice. Psalm xxiv. 6. cv. 3.

1. Seeking the Lord implies that *he is offended*; that there is a state of moral distance between him and us, as between two persons who have disagreed.

Hence God is said to be angry with the wicked every day: both them and their ways doth his soul hate, and he hath shown his displeasure in threatenings and in judgments.

While man was holy, he had communion with him; but now the Lord has left the earth as a desolate heritage.

Man is also afar off from God, exposed to the curse, a stranger and an alien; having no intercourse, and no friendship with God.

Awful however as this state is, it is the character of the wicked, that they are unconcerned about it; are no way affected with a sense of divine displeasure, and are regardless of that loving kindness which is better than life.

2. Seeking him supposes that *a way of reconciliation is opened* by the blood of the cross; and this is true.

God was in Christ Jesus reconciling the world unto himself, and hath committed to his servants the ministry of reconciliation.

He hath so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, and hath set him forth to be a propitiation. We now have access by the faith of him, and are assured that whosoever cometh, he will in no wise cast out.

But the heart of every unconverted sinner is averse to all this: he will not seek, that he may find, nor call, that God may answer: nor

will he come, that he may be pardoned, blessed and saved. The divine proclamation is, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him—the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin—if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive'— But no, he will hear nothing about it: God is not in all his thoughts.

3. Seeking implies the exercise of *repentance and of faith*. This is the foundation of all true religion: there is no seeking without this, or if we seek in any other way, we shall never find. This is the spirit to which every sinner must be brought, and we must seek the Lord in this way, or we must perish. Hence, when the heart of a sinner is turned, he begins to mourn for sin, and to mourn after the Lord. Like the prodigal, he will arise and go to his father: like Saul, behold he prayeth.

But every sinner is averse to all this. He is not willing to come in this humble way, nor willing to take blame and shame to himself: he will not seek after God.

II. Consider the cause to which this aversion is ascribed: "the pride of his countenance."

It might have been said through the pride of his heart; for that is the seat of pride. But in the countenance it is generally expressed. 'Oh how lofty are their eyes, and their eyelids are lifted up.' Prov. xxx. 13.

Now there are various sorts of pride which prevent sinners from seeking mercy through a Mediator: some of these we may just observe—

1. The *pride of intellect* or learning. Some are of a more refined taste than the generality; men of a philosophical description, who disregard divine revelation altogether, and treat the whole of it as an imposture. Others do not do this, but they nevertheless reject its leading doctrines: and whence is it to be accounted for, that men of this description are generally enemies to divine truth? Our text contains the answer: they feel their consequence: and having discovered a few things, they think they know all, and will receive nothing but what agrees with their own reason and preconceived opinions.

Hence when the humbling doctrine of the cross is proposed, which treats all as lost sinners, and places them on a level, they can neither understand nor approve; but think it to be a vulgar error.

This is not to be wondered at: it was so from the beginning. When our Saviour preached, his doctrine was 'hidden from the wise and prudent.' The Greeks also sought after wisdom, and hence the gospel was accounted foolishness. Matt. xi. 25. 1 Cor. i. 20.

A religion which requires a man, a prince or philosopher, to become as a little child; to become a fool that he may be wise; to glory in nothing but the Lord; to be born again, in order that he may see the kingdom of God—is very strange to such men; and their pride rejects it.

2. Another cause is *the pride of wealth*.—There is nothing at all in worldly property that adds to the real worth of any man: it makes him none the wiser, and none the better: yet it gives him some importance in the world: he feels himself of more consequence than his neighbours.

Hence his heart is lifted up, and he looks down upon religion as fit only for vulgar people.

Thus Pharaoh the king: 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice!' So it is with the rich and great men of the world in general. They think all serious religion to be beneath their regard: or if they condescend in any way to notice it, it is only for the sake of public example.

The few acknowledgments that are made of God, are unaccompanied with any mention of the Saviour.

Hence it is a hard thing for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. They are not used to obey, but to command; and cannot think of being brought low. Mark x. 24, 25. James i. 10.

3. The pride of what is called *virtue*. This is self-righteous pride, and hinders a sinner from seeking in God's way as much as any other evil.

This may be seen in many, who in a moral point of view are respectable characters. They cannot possibly see any need there is for them to be brought to deep repentance, for them to be humbled before God, and to believe in a crucified Saviour, as if they were to be classed among the chief of sinners.

Their language is rather like that of the pharisee, 'God I thank thee that I am not as other men'—

Others indeed who have none of this kind of virtue to boast of, value themselves nevertheless on some sort of negative goodness, which as effectually prevents their seeking after God.

This was the ruin of the Jews: they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Rom. x. 2, 3. This also will be the ruin of many others, who are seemingly devout.

4. The pride of *consistency*, or that hardened spirit which is seen in many abandoned characters, and because they cannot bear the idea of yielding to the authority of the gospel, and of submitting to God's way of salvation, they presume to treat religion with scorn and contempt. Some there are who oppose the very idea of religion in any form; they have walked in the way of their own hearts, and are determined to do so still, in spite of all consequences.

They care for none of these things: but are despisers of them that are good, and resolved on a course of desperate consistency. Job xxi. 14, 15. Prov. i. 29, 30 Jer. xvii. 9.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) Consider the *motives* to seek the Lord, notwithstanding the pride of wicked men. The door of mercy is now open: seek ye the Lord, while he may be found.

Jesus invites you to come, and he is able to save to the utmost. The door of mercy will soon be shut: now only is the accepted time.

(2) Whether you seek the Lord or not, this haughty pride *must come down*, and that in a little time. Isai. ii. 17. It must come down, either by choice or by force. The former has the promise of being exalted; Luke xiv. 11: the latter will end in final ruin.

(3) Let those who have been truly brought to seek the Lord, *rejoice*.

They shall not seek in vain, they shall never be confounded. Isai. xlv. 19.

TRIUMPHS OF THE FAITHFUL.

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony ; and they loved not their lives unto the death.—
Revelation xii. 11.

Considering the text as a prophecy, it is interesting to us, as it must refer to the present time, or to a period that is fast approaching ; for this chapter contains one of those general representations of the rise and reign, and final overthrow of the papal antichrist, which are frequently to be met with in this mysterious book. In the first of these representations, the church of God is considered as a ' temple,' the outer court of which is given to the gentiles, for a thousand two hundred and threescore days, and the faithful are called witnesses. In the passage before us the church is considered as a ' woman' and her seed, and the rise of antichrist as a great red dragon pursuing after them. The true church flees into the wilderness for a thousand two hundred and three score days: ver. 6, 14. But a war commences, ver. 7: the end of which is, the victory and triumph proclaimed in our text.

We are included in this period: the war is still going on, and our work is to bear testimony for God. The weapons of our warfare must be spiritual, like those that are here mentioned.

Two things principally require attention—The conflict of believers—and the means of victory.

I. View the conflict in which christians are engaged.

This may be considered in two respects, either social or individual.

1. God's people are a little army *collectively*, having Christ for their leader. Rev. xix. 11—14. From the time of his coming, Satan was attacked in all directions ; upon his own ground, the heathen world ; and he fell like lightning from heaven.

The servants of Christ acquitted themselves gloriously during the three first centuries ; but after this they became confounded with the world, and Satan again triumphed.

Yet God has never been without his witnesses, though his cause has been driven into the wilderness : there is still a handful of men, like Gideon's army, whose hearts the Lord has touched, and they shall be finally victorious.

Popery, mahomedanism, paganism, and infidelity shall fall before them, together with every species of error and false religion. Only let Christ's little army be united and active, faithful and patient, and of good courage, and the cause must triumph.

2. Christians have also to maintain a conflict *individually*.

From the day we put on Christ, or become his servants, we enter on a warfare with all the powers of darkness.

(1) True religion often excites the *resentment of the wicked*, who feel themselves condemned by it. Hence in some ages a flood of persecution has followed, as was the case with those mentioned in our text.

Where this spirit is restrained, there are domestic antipathies and in-

juries, like that of Cain towards Abel, and of Ishmael towards Isaac; the father against the son, and the son against the father; so that a believer is no sooner such in reality, than he has some kind of opposition to encounter.

(2) This is not always the most difficult to overcome: the smiles and *temptations of the world* are still a greater trial. These constitute the principal danger of the present day: we know but little of the former, and through a natural love of ease we are prone to undue conformity to the present world, retaining its manners, and imbibing too much of its spirit.

(3) Besides these, we have much to combat *within our own hearts*; and this being nearer home, is the greatest of all difficulties.

Here the tempter has hold of us, and the world less hold. Psal. xl. 12.

We would not mind innumerable evils from without, if all was but right within: but on this account the mind is discouraged; 'therefore my heart faileth me.' We are in danger of being overcome, by being first drawn into sin, and then by sinking into despondency.

II. Observe the means by which the victory is to be obtained: "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony."

Let us first notice the weapons of this warfare, and afterwards their adaptedness to obtain the victory—

1. Christ is called *the Lamb*, which is a favourite appellation of the evangelist John. Here it is to be understood in a sacrificial sense, as the Lamb that had been slain from the foundation of the world.

2. *The blood* of the Lamb means the blood-shedding of the Saviour, as the means of obtaining the victory. This gave a fatal blow to Satan's kingdom, at the very time that Jesus became a sacrifice for us; and now its influence still goes on to complete the destruction.

The sacred writer is also careful to mark the distinction between this and the blood of the martyrs, as in chap. vii. 14. They did but overcome, and it was not through their own death, but his; it was "by the blood of the Lamb."

3. *The word of their testimony* also contributed to the victory: this both inspires and supports the witnesses. That which they declare to others is the strength of their own souls; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, 'even our faith.' 1 John v. 4.

Farther observe how these weapons are adapted to achieve the conquest—

(1) It is by a believing view of the testimony of Jesus that we first obtain the victory over sin and the curse, so as to be delivered from the guilt and condemnation which stood against us. Faith in the Redeemer imparts both purity and peace, and he becomes the Lord our righteousness and strength.

(2) By the same means his servants have been upheld under the

heaviest persecutions. "They loved not their lives unto the death."

The love of life is natural, and so is the desire of peace, prosperity, liberty, and safety. That which requires the sacrifice of these, must form one of the severest trials: yet the love of Jesus is able to sustain it, and becomes superior to every other consideration.

(3) By the faith of the gospel we overcome our *evil propensities*.

No other principle is so strong, no doctrine so efficacious and so full of motives, as the doctrine of the cross. 'Here sacred violence assaults the soul.'—

(4) By believing views of invisible objects, we overcome the various *workings of despondency*.

Some have fallen under despair, like Saul and Judas; but the blood of Christ, and the promises of grace in him, are the continual support of all them that believe. 1 John ii. 1.

(5) The preaching of Christ crucified will be the means of finally overthrowing *the power of Satan in the world*.

Providence may concur to help forward the work in another way; one evil may be overruled for the extermination of another; but the grand victory will be owing to the blood of the Lamb. Rev. i. 5, 6.

THE PENITENT MALEFACTOR.

But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.— Luke xxiii. 40—43.

Christ is said to have triumphed over principalities and powers on his cross, and surely the conversion and salvation of this poor sinner affords a wonderful instance of it, and serves as a specimen of his mercy to future ages. Well may it be said, 'this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even the chief.'

This unhappy man and his fellow sufferer were "malefactors," common thieves or robbers. They had probably been partners in guilt, and both suffered for the same offence: but how great the difference between them in the final hour. The one dies in his impenitence, the other owns that he suffered justly, though at first they both railed on the dying Saviour. We may therefore well consider the penitent thief as a singular instance of the power and grace of God towards the very chief of sinners. While falling himself a sacrifice to the malice of Satan, Jesus snatches a lamb as it were out of the mouth of the lion, and takes with him to paradise, a sinner who was sinking into the pit of destruction.

I. Notice in the dying thief the operations of genuine repentance.

His situation allowed him no other opportunity of showing his grief and sorrow for sin, than by the few words which dropped from his lips while he was suspended on the cross; but these afford full proof of his sincerity. His hands and feet were nailed, but his heart was free; and his lips not being yet closed in death, he will do all he can to glorify the Saviour.

1. He begins to rebuke the reviling malefactor: "Dost not thou fear God?"

There were none left to defend the Saviour's cause: the disciples had all forsook him and fled, and his friends were standing afar off: the multitude around him were full of derision, and John and the woman who stood near the cross were overwhelmed with grief.

The dying malefactor will therefore plead for him, and boldly reproves the daring sinner at his side, whose mouth was full of cursing and bitterness.

This was genuine repentance, and genuine love, which could not bear that Jesus should be dishonoured by railing accusations, nor that scandals should be cast on him.

2. He *confesses his sin*, and acknowledges the equity of his sentence. "We indeed," says he, "suffer justly."

His confession was public and open, in the presence of innumerable witnesses, and of innumerable enemies.

It was also of the most disinterested kind: he had nothing to hope for from man, no prospect of deliverance; there was nothing to extort his confession but the deepest sense of guilt.

Here could be no room for fear, for they had done their worst upon him: he was looking to Christ for salvation, but owns his condemnation to be just.

This indeed is confessing and giving glory to God, and that in the first place, and in the highest sense; for this confession was made *before* any plea for mercy was offered, so that whether he was saved or not, he justifies and glorifies God; and this is the spirit of genuine repentance.

3. He *vindicates* the character of Christ, while he unequivocally condemns himself. "This man has done nothing amiss."

Herein indeed he charged his country with the guilt of crucifying the Lord of glory; and while he himself pleads guilty, he pleads the innocence of Christ before the same tribunal.

This is an instance of magnanimity worthy of the character of the true penitent. "Do I not hate them, oh Lord, that hate thee; and am I not grieved with them that rise up against thee?" Psal. cxxxix. 21.

4. His repentance is accompanied with *faith in Christ*: he called him "Lord."

Multitudes were deriding him, his disciples had all forsaken him, and he appeared in circumstances of the deepest abasement, sinking under weakness and disgrace; yet this poor sinner owns him as the Lord, a name which implies every high idea of Christ. 1 Cor. xii. 3.

He also believes that Christ had a "kingdom," a kingdom not of this world, and that he was going to possess it. Though he now appeared as an outcast from heaven and earth, yet he considered him as the Lord of the invisible world.

He must likewise have believed that Christ, when he came to his kingdom, would there be the advocate of sinners, and would make intercession for trans-

gressors; or had he fully known this, his prayer could not have been more appropriate.

This was great faith, especially if we consider how this poor sinner came by the knowledge of Christ. Probably he could not read, was unacquainted with the prophecies, had never seen Jesus before, nor heard any thing about him; his enemies triumphed, his friends were scattered. What he hears is only from the mouth of his accusers, and he had to collect his knowledge of Christ from the derision and scorn of the multitude; yet he realizes all that in him which they denied to him.

5. His repentance is accompanied with *earnest prayer*: "Lord, remember me."

This is very brief, but full and comprehensive, being the utterance of the heart.

He does not specify the object of his prayer, yet he selects the most appropriate terms in which to express himself, and leaves it with the Lord to give him what he needed. Lord, remember me, think of me in love, like Joseph to the butler.

When it goes well with thee, remember me. He might have said, Lord, pardon me, bless me, and save me; but this includes all. Let me but have a place in thy heart, and all the rest will follow.

The terms were also remarkably adapted to his present condition; for who would 'remember' him, if Christ did not? His enemies would all forget him in a little time; and his friends, if he had any, would be glad to forget him as a reproach to them—an outcast of society, a thief and a malefactor. 'Lord, remember me.'

He might have thought his sin too great to be pardoned, but he does not, neither does he despair of an interest in the Saviour's love: Lord, remember me.

Self-righteous pride would have prevented his making such an application for mercy as utterly in vain, and such a spirit would have objected to prayer on account of his utter unworthiness: but he is not discouraged by the greatness of his guilt.

Oh what faith; what a conviction of the infinite ability of the Saviour.

II. View the conduct of our Lord towards him: "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

1. Though Christ would take no notice of a reviler, nor give any answer to the language of reproach, yet he would *attend to the plea of mercy*; and to the plea of one of the most unworthy, and the least likely to obtain it.

He would hear the prayer of a perishing sinner whose heart was contrite, even in the hour of death. What condescension, and what love!

2. He answered him *without delay*, He for a time deferred the request of one poor woman who sought him with great importunity, and suffered her to be repulsed; and though he answered at last, yet he kept her in long suspense. Matt. xv. 22, 23.

But this was an urgent case: the sinner was dying, and there was no time for delay: it was well the word was nigh him, and the Saviour so near at hand.

3. As the petition had *implied much*, so did the answer. To be with Jesus, to be with him in paradise, was more than he could ask or think. This would be all in all, not only including the forgiveness of sin, acceptance with God, and eternal life, but more than could enter

into the heart of man to conceive. The penitent had only asked of Jesus to remember him ; but Jesus tells him he should be with him. He asked to be remembered at some future time, he knew not when ; but Jesus tells him that “to-day” he should be blessed.

4. The promise is pronounced with a solemn *asseveration* ; “Verily, I say unto thee.” This bears the form of an oath, and gives the fullest assurance for the performance of the promise. Heb. vi. 18.

REFLECTIONS.

(1) We may observe, that there is a great difference between the conduct of this dying malefactor, and that of many dying penitents who are supposed to be converted. They often speak confidently of their state, and of their going to heaven ; but this poor man did not, though Christ said so of him. He prayed that he might be saved ; and after what Christ said, he might believe that he should ; but he himself said not a word of that. The strong language that was used was Christ’s, and not his.

(2) The mercy shown to the penitent thief, affords an encouraging example to perishing sinners. Christ is now in his kingdom, the Advocate is with the Father, making intercession for us ; let us therefore come boldly to a throne of grace. He does not forget Joseph, as the butler did. Glory and honour do not render him unmindful of his people : he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

(3) There is a request on Christ’s part as well as on ours : he desires to be remembered by us. 1 Cor. xi. 24. He does not need it as we do ; but love desires it, and wishes to live in the mind of its objects.

THE BLESSINGS OF SLEEP.

I laid me down and slept : I awaked : for the Lord sustained me.—
Psalm iii. 5.

We learn from the title of this psalm, that it was written when ‘David fled from Absalom his son.’ This was one of the greatest calamities that could fall to the lot of a human being. After reigning in peace for a series of years, rebellion broke out in his own house : the aged monarch was obliged to flee from his capital, and it was with difficulty that he escaped with his life. The calamity was unspeakably increased by its having originated in the perfidy and disaffection of a son, and none but a parent can conceive the anguish which at this moment oppressed the heart of David.

In such perilous circumstances, the holy psalmist accounts it no small mercy that he was kept in safety ; ‘Thou, oh Lord, art a shield for me, and the lifter up of my head.’ And he ascribes it entirely to the good-

ness of God, that he was permitted to 'sleep,' amidst such perils and dangers, and felt himself superior to the agitations of fear. 'I laid me down and slept,' says he, 'and will not be afraid of ten thousands of people.'

It is a very obvious remark, that things strike us less in proportion to their frequency: yet why should this be the case? The gifts of God are not less valuable for being common: on the contrary, their repetition affords higher motives to gratitude. One of the greatest blessings of human existence is contemplated by David in the passage before us; yet no one is more in danger of being overlooked, because no one recurs more frequently, and because its beneficial effects are not duly appreciated.

With a view then to quicken our gratitude for this inestimable blessing, I would endeavour to point out some of its advantages, and the obligations we owe to the sustaining hand of God, during the silent hours of repose.

1. It is natural for serious thinking men to reflect on this part of the divine economy with sentiments of gratitude, as it is evidently the result of infinite wisdom and goodness.—We are so constituted both in body and soul, as to render it necessary that there should be a suspension of labour, and as it were, a pause in our existence. No one could sustain the uninterrupted exertion of all the faculties; and the greatest tyrants have sought to inflict the largest portion of misery upon their victims, by depriving them of the advantages of sleep. There is such a thing as mental fatigue, as well as that which is corporeal; and while 'the sleep of a labouring man is sweet,' it is well known that 'much study is a weariness to the flesh.' However mysterious it may appear, it is certainly a fact, that the operation of thought tends to exhaust the vigour of the mental faculties, in an equal proportion as manual labour diminishes the vigour of the corporeal frame; and to both, sleep is rendered an exquisite and invaluable balm. It is also a proof of the divine goodness, that even sorrow disposes to sleep, and thus brings with it its own relief. This was affectingly exemplified in the case of the disciples, when in the garden of Gethsemane.

2. If we reflect on the state of sleep, together with its appendages, we shall also find occasion for gratitude and admiration.—Nothing is more mysterious, though nothing is more familiar, than this awful pause in the functions of human life. Milton compares the profound sleep into which Adam was cast, to a 'sliding back into his original nothingness;' and Homer calls sleep 'the brother of death.' It is true, many of the functions of life must go forward during this interval; the heart continues to pulsate, the lungs to respire, though more slowly, and the peristaltic motion is also kept up: but there is the same unconsciousness of surrounding objects as in death, the same prostration of the corporeal and mental faculties; so that were any intelligent being, who had never seen a person asleep, to visit this kingdom in the midnight hour, he would imagine that a greater calamity had befallen it than was inflicted upon Egypt, when all their first-born were slain; and all the regions of

repose would resemble one vast and universal sepulture. But how astonished would he be, to see them all rise from this state of insensibility, and animated with renewed vigour, pursuing the various avocations of life. Our familiarity with sleep, as an ordinary occurrence, is the only apparent reason why it ceases to surprise us: but surely there is enough to excite our gratitude and admiration.

3. Another mysterious, but highly interesting circumstance, attending this condition of the human frame, is the faculty of dreaming.—Sensible as we are of impressions during sleep, or rather when half awake, we are utterly unacquainted with their real nature, and for the most part they are entirely obliterated, leaving the person perfectly unconscious of his mental range.

In the early ages of the world especially, it pleased the supreme Being to render this part of the human economy subservient to his designs of mercy. ‘God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not: in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed: then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.’ When the human family are fallen asleep like infants upon the lap of the great and universal Parent, and all their faculties lie prostrate at his feet, then, to ‘hide pride from man,’ he calls them into exercise at his pleasure, and shows his uncontrouled dominion over the world of spirits.

Nebuchadnezzar received in a dream an intimation of the fate of his empire, ‘that he might know the vanity of the thoughts of his heart.’ In a vision of the night Eliphaz was accosted by a spirit, and he heard a voice saying, ‘Shall mortal man be more just than God.’ So common was this mode of intercourse between heaven and earth, that no other was expected by old-testament saints. Moses only was permitted to ‘speak with God face to face.’ Leaving however, what more especially belonged to the age of miracles, let us proceed to remark,

4. The dangers from which we are preserved during the hours of repose, and how much we owe to the providence of God for our peace and safety. The midnight assassin might easily effect his purpose, if God in his mercy did not prevent. No prudence of ours could be availing: the mind has retired from its ordinary station, left every post unoccupied, every avenue exposed, having no controul over surrounding objects. And how many in this hour of darkness, in this state of unconsciousness, have been assassinated in their beds, and have scarcely felt the violence of death, or been apprehensive of the change, till they have lifted up their eyes in eternity.

How many more have slept the sleep of death, when in perfect health: have laid themselves down, to wake not, till the heavens be no more. And oh, how much more frequently would such instances occur, if the infinite ‘Watcher,’ who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, was not about our bed by night, as well as our path by day! Well might the holy psalmist exclaim, ‘I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.’

We are also exposed to innumerable invisible enemies, whose malignant influence might be employed in scaring us with dreams, in terrifying us with visions, and afflicting us in ways innumerable and unknown: and what but the shield of

heaven could protect us, in a state so helpless and exposed. The bed of Solomon was guarded by threescore valiant men, because of fear in the night: but here an arm of flesh is totally insufficient. Nor do we less need to be protected from the pestilence that walketh in darkness, and the innumerable diseases that wait around, to hurry mortals home.

5. The devout psalmist was deeply affected with a sense of the divine goodness in recalling him into life, as well as in preserving him during the silent hours of repose. "I awaked, for thou, Lord, sustained me."—If it be difficult to account for sleep, it is equally so to account for our waking: this is altogether a mysterious part of the divine economy. It is true, if a person wishes to sleep, he may remove whatever comes in contact with his senses: light from the optic nerve, and sound from the ear. Yet after all, we only know what it is that may prevent sleep, or disturb repose, without being acquainted with the mysterious process by which it is effected. And what is most remarkable, though light and sound may prevent sleep, we are not generally awaked by either. There is frequently no exciting cause: we awake when all is tranquil around us, and generally at the same hour or moment of time, if accustomed to early rising. No adequate cause appearing to account for this phenomenon, the sacred writers, who saw the hand of God in every thing, seem to have ascribed it to some supernatural operation upon the dormant powers. Of the prophets it is said, he 'wakeneth them morning by morning,' rising early and sending them. Job also exclaims with grateful admiration, Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him; or the son of man, that thou shouldst 'visit him every morning.' And the holy psalmist, 'I awaked, for thou, Lord, sustained me.'

How infatuated then is the conduct of that man, who can retire to rest without committing himself into the hands of God. It is the lot of many persons to die in sleep. Besides, it is so much like death, that who in his senses would dare to resign himself to sleep, that is not prepared to awake in eternity! Let us then bow the knee every evening, and commit to God the keeping of our souls and bodies: and in the morning, when he has given us back our faculties, and we have received ourselves as it were from him afresh, what remains, but that we dedicate our powers to his service, and go forth as his husbandmen, sowing the seed of eternal life.

What a lesson of humility does this subject teach us; for when absorbed in sleep, there is no difference between a wise man and a fool, but every man becomes an idiot once in twenty-four hours. The operation of the human faculties is suspended, and all are placed on a footing of helpless equality; the sceptre drops from the hands of the mightiest king, and the crown falls from his head.

The Supreme Being withholds from sovereigns these adventitious distinctions, to remind them that he will soon take them away for ever; and with respect to all of us, he suspends the ordinary exercise of our faculties, to teach us our absolute dependence upon him. But there are distinctions which are not adventitious, and which belong to the righteous

only. They have a portion which no revolutions can change, and which the gloom of the sepulchre cannot obscure. He is their portion who hath eternal life in himself: he also will show them the path of life, in his presence, fulness of joy, and at his right hand pleasures for evermore.

Though sleep may be justly ranked amongst our greatest blessings, it is nevertheless liable to great abuse; and if we spend that time in ease and self-indulgence, which ought to be devoted to active pursuits, we come under the condemnation of the slothful and unprofitable servant. Some persons are so in love with sleep, that they are never entirely free from its influence. But what a reflection is it upon the understanding of a man, that he can find nothing to prefer to a state of insensibility. Young persons especially should be cautioned against acquiring a habit of slothfulness, as this is an inlet to numerous temptations: and let all christians be careful to afford an example of diligence and sobriety; that they be not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

MORAL DISEASES AND THEIR REMEDY.

Lord be merciful unto me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.—Psalm xli. 4.

Part of this psalm evidently refers to Christ: the ninth verse contains a kind of prophecy concerning Judas. There was a great resemblance however in many things between David and David's Son, especially in the persecutions which they endured. The troubles which are here enumerated, refer more immediately to those parts of David's life in which conspiracies were formed against him. But in all his troubles he eyes the hand of God, and sees the punishment of his former sin.

Moral evil is here described as a disease, and the mercy of God as the only remedy. Upon each of these parts of the subject, we shall offer a few remarks.

I. Notice the disease: "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee."

There is some analogy between the body and the soul, and between the diseases of the one and the other.

1. Bodily disease consists in *disorder*, or some derangement in the system. And what is the disease of the soul, but something analogous to this? The order of the soul consists in the love of God and man: this is order, this the healthful spirit of his grace. But the soul of man by nature, is altogether out of order, there is nothing right: all his powers are perverted. This disorder too is universal, from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet. Isai. v. 6.

2. *Pain* is generally attendant on disease, and this also is one of the concomitants of our moral malady. The misery of the wicked is great upon him, especially when conscience is awakened to a sense of guilt and danger. Behold an awakened sinner, a dying sinner, what pain and anguish does he feel.

3. Another general effect is *offensiveness*, and unfitness for society. The leper must go out of the camp, crying, unclean, unclean. Such is the case of the sinner: his defilement renders him unfit for intercourse with holy beings.

4. All disease has a *tendency to death*; so has this moral disease. Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. This is its natural tendency, and nothing can counteract it but the grace of God.

The diseases of the soul may farther be distinguished into common and special.

(1) There is a disease which is *common* to every sinner, and which arises from sin as such. It belongs to us as fallen creatures, who are born in sin, and are by nature children of wrath. The corruption of our nature appears as we grow up in life, in all the vain and sinful passions of youth and maturer age. There is an aversion of heart from God, and every thing that is holy.

Perhaps it may be objected, that if sin be universal, it would be equal and alike in all. But it is not so, because in some the principles of evil are *aided* by connections, by early habits, and by other circumstances, which soon bring sin to maturity, and sinners to their end. What numbers of premature deaths are occasioned by excess. In others, this moral disease is *counteracted* by education, by early instruction and example, and by habits of sobriety. Yet in that case the disease is suppressed, rather than healed.

(2) There are also *special* diseases, which may arise from particular sins. These apply more particularly to the faults and backslidings of good men, as was the case with David; and we are continually in danger of wounding our own souls, by the sin which most easily besets us.

II. Consider the remedy: "Be merciful unto me, and heal my soul."

We must follow the example of David, as poor sinners we must go to a merciful God. This is the medium between self-righteous presumption and despair, either of which would be fatal to our souls.

Consider how great the mercy is, that this disease is not absolutely incurable. It is so indeed to us, but not to the Lord. Matt. xvii. 16, 17. Like the leprosy of old, it yields to no human application.

And how does the *mercy of God* become a remedy? Is Christ to be excluded? No: the text is old testament language, which is general and more indefinite than that of the gospel: but it is the same mercy as that of which we read in Titus iii. 4—7. This is the remedy, and the only remedy; the mercy of God through a Mediator.

This is it to which the primitive ministers directed the attention of their hearers, saying, Behold the Lamb of God. And thus as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so also is the Son of man lifted up, and sinners may look, believe, and live.

1. This must be the remedy to the *awakened sinner*. Do not stop to enquire what your convictions or what your experience may have been: let your eye be wholly on the Saviour, and not on any thing in yourselves, or in any other. This is the first and only true relief you will be able to obtain. You may be 'healed' by other means; by abstaining from former sins, by an attention to duties, by falling in with some self-flattering scheme of doctrine; but these will not do. You are healed but slightly when so healed; and cry, peace, peace, when there is no peace. Jer. vi. 14. Go to Jordan, wash and be clean. The Saviour's blood is the only fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Zech. xiii. 1.

This will restore the soul to order, this will remove pain, and inspire it with life, and peace, and joy.

2. This also must be the remedy for the *backsliding christian*. Such are also in danger of being healed slightly, by wearing away a sense of guilt, instead of washing it away in the blood of the Lamb; and by forbearing from sin, rather than having it mortified and subdued. Sometimes an attempt is made to heal the wounded soul, by trying to make out evidences of grace, and a title to heaven, by looking on past experience, instead of looking to the cross of Christ. But we shall never be healed till we repair to the great Physician, and offer up the prayer of David: "Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee."

FATAL ISSUE OF FINAL IMPENITENCE.

Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered.—
Job ix. 4.

Bildad, one of Job's friends, considered his complaints as amounting to a rebellion against God: ch. viii. 3. Job is greatly moved at this, and disowns the charge with abhorrence. "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?"

The words however imply, that there is such a thing as for a man so to harden himself as to contend with God: and that where this is the case, it is certain to come to a dreadful issue.

I. Enquire wherein this hardness of heart consists.

1. The word signifies a spirit that is *obstinate and incorrigible*; full of perverseness, keeping up a contention with God. In Scripture language it is being stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears. Neh. ix. 16, 17. Acts vii. 51.

2. It is descriptive of that *rebellious spirit*, which discovers itself under the various dispensations of God, both in a way of mercy and of

judgment. Thus Pharaoh acted : sometimes he seemed humble and willing to submit : but when the judgment was withdrawn, he resumed his former resolution, and continued to harden himself against God.

3. There is also a *judicial hardness* to which sinners are liable, in a way of righteous judgment for their iniquities. God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart ; not that he produces evil in the mind of man, which is utterly impossible, James i. 13 : but through man's perverseness, the divine dispensations make him worse instead of better.

If the providences of God do not soften the human mind, it generally becomes thereby more hardened. Thus also the gospel produces a similar effect, where its influence is rejected : and instead of being a savour of life unto life, it becomes a savour of death unto death. 2 Cor. ii. 16.

This is not owing to any defect in the gospel, or in the dispensations of God towards us ; but to the depravity of the human heart, which perverts the means of salvation into those of destruction. Hence this impenitent hardness is ascribed to man, as well as to God ; to show that God has no influence in the matter, so as to affect man's free agency and accountability.

II. Notice some of the instances in which this sin is still committed.

Ineffectual and dangerous as it is for any one to harden himself against God, it is a sin no less prevalent than formerly ; and it will become us to notice the different ways in which it operates, that we may be warned against it.

1. It appears in indulging *hard thoughts of God*, of his government and of his holy law : in esteeming him as a hard master, and in considering sinful propensities as an excuse for sinful actions, though no one thinks of excusing the offence of others against himself on the ground of such a plea. The indulgence of such thoughts lead on to final impenitence.

2. It manifests itself in a rejection or *dislike of God's way of salvation*. This impenitent aversion is directed against its freeness, as placing all men alike on a level. Against its sovereignty, in that God should have mercy on whom he will have mercy : and its language is, ' why doth he yet find fault ? ' This was the stumbling block to the hardened and unbelieving Jews. Isai. vi. 9, 10. Rom. ix. 29—33.

3. Persisting in an evil course, *amidst many convictions and fears*, is another instance of this sort of depravity. Pharaoh knew that he was wrong, and yet he dared to persist. Many have great light and strong convictions, yet they have loved idols, and after them they will go. Some under threatening afflictions will do the same.

4. This hardness of heart appears in the *resistance that is offered to the hand of God in providence* instead of being humbled under it. The great end of adverse providences is to make us willing to accept the punishment of our iniquity. Lev. xxvi. 41. Instead of this, many are like Ephraim, a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke : and

when their plans are frustrated, they still persevere in rebellion against God. Isai. ix. 10. This is desperate wickedness, and braving the divine judgments. It is an evil thing to be haughty in the day of prosperity, but more so in a day of adversity: this is incorrigible wickedness.

5. *Presumptuously tempting God*, amidst the most affecting means of salvation, is another instance of this hardness of heart. It was thus with Israel in the wilderness. God spared them time after time, yet they rebelled against him. They were warned of this impenitence and unbelief, five hundred years afterwards, Psal. xcv. 8—11: and after a thousand years more, the same warning was repeated, but without effect, for they perished in their unbelief. Heb. iii. 12.

III. The fatal issue of final impenitence: "Who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?"

1. The longer you continue in this state, the *more hardened* you will become, till at last you will be past feeling. Ephes. iv. 19. This is the natural effect of unbelief, and sinning against God.

2. This also is the way in which God *punishes men* for their impenitence. Isai. vi. 8. And if God should give you up to this state, where would you be at last!

3. *The end* of this impenitence and hardness of heart is fearfully described by an apostle, and should warn us of our danger. Rom. ii. 5—9.

Let it be remarked however, that these awful consequences proceed on the supposition that this impenitence is finally persisted in, and that mercy is promised to the returning sinner. Isai. lv. 7. Many have been brought to drop the controversy with God, as Ephraim did, and have found mercy. Jer. xxxi. 19, 20. And all other impenitent sinners are invited and encouraged to follow his example. Isai. xlvi. 12, 13.

UNION WITH CHRIST THE SOURCE OF TRUE RELIGION.

Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come, and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.—Isaiah xlv. 24.

The former part of this chapter foretels the deliverance to be effected by Cyrus: the latter part looks to the times of the Messiah. From the twentieth verse there is a continued remonstrance against idolatry, and an admonition to idolators to come and believe in Christ. The Lord had pleaded with them in his judgments; now he pleads with them by his word: ver. 21. He is here revealed as the only true God, in whom is united the character of the Just and the Justifier: hence the invita-

tion in ver. 22. To this invitation is added an oath, that they should submit, and that opposition would be utterly in vain : ver. 23.

This in the New Testament is applied to Christ. Phil. ii. 10, 11.

The passage under consideration is in general a prophecy of the success of the gospel, and the confusion that should overtake those who continued to be Christ's enemies.

More particularly, we may observe—(1) That the term “one” is here put for an indefinite number, as in parallel passage. Isai. xlv. 5.—(2) The “righteousness” we have in the Lord, is that on account of which we are justified ; ver. 25.—(3) The “strength” which we have in him is spiritual, pertaining to our sanctification.—(4) “Coming” to him denotes our believing on him for both these blessings.

I. Offer a few remarks on the righteousness of Christ, as the medium of our justification.

It is a law term, and supposes that God is our lawgiver and our judge, and that we must undergo a solemn trial before him. If we had been what we should be, we should have a righteousness of our own. God would give us our due, and we need not fear appearing before him. But we have not, Psal. cxxx. 3 : hence if we be justified, it must be by the righteousness of another.

1. This is the great *turning point of the gospel*, which Paul labours so much to establish. Yet this was the stumblingblock to the Jews, Rom. ix. 32, and is so still to all self-righteous persons.

This doctrine has been taught from the beginning, by types and analogous transactions. Noah to the old world. Abraham to his posterity.

David to his, ‘for my Servant David’s sake.’ God in all these instances exhibited the principle of bestowing favours on the unworthy, for the sake of the worthy : these are examples of the righteousness of one being as it were imputed to many. The reason why faith justifies is its immediate relation to *Christ*. It was Abraham’s believing *in him* that was imputed for righteousness, and on that account only.

2. The righteousness of Christ imputed to believers is *his obedience unto death*. It was that in which God was well pleased. It is that for the sake of which he pardons and accepts those who believe in him ; and not any thing in us, either before, in, or after believing.

Repentance and faith are necessary to our justification, but not as causes : they are only the means of bringing us to Christ for justification and eternal life.

3. So full and complete is this righteousness, that it is *sufficient for the chief of sinners*. God will as readily pardon and accept the greatest as the least of sinners who believe in him. Rom. iii. 22.

II. Notice the grace of Christ, as being our strength.

Having ‘righteousness’ in the Lord, denotes that we are under condemnation.

Our having ‘strength’ in him implies, that we have no power or help in ourselves, to extricate ourselves out of this condition, or to do any thing to appease the divine anger. Rom. v. 6.

Here we may observe—

1. That *all attempts to overcome sin*, prior to our coming to Christ, are labour in vain. The majority of sinners never try to overcome it, but are contented to go down the stream: they think they can overcome, but never try. They only avoid what is disreputable, and that merely for their own sake, but never attempt to gain the victory. The awakened sinner often tries; yet he only sins and stumbles but the more, growing worse instead of better. Even good men, if depending on their own strength, do nothing but stumble on in the dark. Who then is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God. 1 John v. 4. 5.

2. *All our activity for God* is derived from him. Those who have done the most in serving him are most ready to acknowledge that all their springs were in him. Paul acknowledged that all he did was 'through Christ strengthening him;' and that it was not he, but Christ who lived in him. Gal. ii. 20. Phil. iv. 13. It is a mystery that our strength should be in another; yet every babe in Christ experimentally understands it. When strong, then are we weak; when weak, then are we strong. We know too, that the more we sink into nothing, and depend upon Christ, the more active and successful we become in our labours for God. 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. 1 Cor. x. 12. 2 Tim. ii. 1.

3. All that *fortitude and patience* which some have exemplified in times of affliction and persecution, is alike derived from Christ. The weakest have here been strong, and have braved the terrors of death in every form. Whatever be the thorn in the flesh, his grace is sufficient for us, and in him alone we have righteousness and strength.

III. Observe the necessity of coming to Christ for both these blessings.

1. Without this we have *no revealed interest* in the righteousness of Christ, nor can we derive any strength from him. The justification of which the Scriptures speak is 'by faith;' it is not what we are in the divine purposes, but what we are in the estimation of truth.

Now every unbeliever is under condemnation: faith is that in this case which union to Christ is: it makes us one with him, so that all he has become ours. The sacrifice and obedience of Christ make only 'the comers thereunto' perfect. Heb. x. 1. To us it shall be imputed, if we believe. Rom. iv. 23, 24. We must therefore forsake all self-righteous hopes, must come as guilty and unworthy, not waiting for qualifications, or any thing to render us meet for his acceptance.

2. There is no *obstruction* to coming but what lies in your own minds. If thou canst believe, all things are possible. The spirit and the bride say, come. Christ himself invites. It is either self-sufficiency, or insensibility of your need, or love of the world, or attachment to your idols, that prevents your coming to him.

Oh think how many have come, and what blessedness has followed. And lo, he calleth thee!

3. If you come not for righteousness and strength, you *must come to his bar* to receive your doom. Then it will be found that it was enmity, nothing but groundless enmity against Christ, that prevented your coming to him for mercy; and this will cover you with confusion in that day. "All that are incensed against him shall be ashamed."

PRAYER OF THE DEMONIAK.

Now the man out of whom the devils were departed, besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee.—Luke viii. 38, 39.

The history of this chapter affords a glorious display of the power of Christ over that of Satan, and of his mercy towards men.

Matthew speaks of two demoniacs, Mark and Luke mention only one. Doubtless there were two, though one might be more notorious than the other, as in the case of blind Bartimeus.

The effects of the miracle which Christ wrought on this occasion were different, according to the state and disposition of the parties concerned. It is remarkable however, that they all presented a petition to the Saviour. First, the demons, that they might be 'sent away.' This might be from the wish of doing farther mischief.—Next, the people, that 'he would depart out of their coast.' We might have expected a request very different from this, or at least that they would have prayed the Saviour to abide with them, to counteract the malignant influence of Satan: but no, they prefer their swine to him.—Lastly, there is the prayer of the poor demoniac: that whithersoever Christ went, he might be permitted to go with him.

It is also worthy of notice, that the occasion of this man's conversion and salvation was a sore affliction, one of the greatest that could befall him. The Lord has indeed chosen many in the furnace of affliction. How different the state of Judah, when going into captivity, and when coming out of it. Many others have been the same. The poor demoniac suffered the most grievous affliction; but it brought him and the Saviour together; so that we know not what is good for a man in this life. The most that looks like religion in king Nebuchadnezzar, was after he had been transformed into a beast. Dan. iv. 34—37.

We may also see in this event, the discriminating nature of the grace of God. Not every one who was miraculously healed, was savingly converted; but this was a double cure of both soul and body. When our Lord healed ten lepers, only one of them came to give God thanks; the rest continued in their unbelief.

Let us now consider the import of the prayer in our text—and the reason why it was not granted.

I. The import of the Demoniac's Prayer: "He besought the Lord that he might be with him."

The motives that would lead him to form such a wish are very obvious—

1. What Christ had done for him, had fixed his *faith and confidence in him*. It was therefore natural that he should throw himself as it were, into the arms of his Saviour, to be henceforth preserved from every danger. He might fear that the foul spirit would return, and therefore wished to be near his great deliverer, who had shown himself so mighty to save. 'Abide thou with me,' said David to Abiathar, and 'fear not; for he that seeketh my life, seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.' Thus also it is needful for us to abide with Jesus, that he may save and preserve us from all evil.

2. What Christ had done for him, had *fixed his love upon him*; and where love is fixed, it is natural for us to desire to be with the object.

It was thus with Ruth, and with two of John's disciples. Ruth i. 16, 17. John i. 37, 38. We cannot indeed be so with Jesus in this world, as the demoniac was or wished to be: but if we truly love him, we shall desire in every possible way to be with him. This it is that makes the house of God and the closet sweet: this makes heaven sweet and desirable: being with Jesus is all in all. Col. iii. 1. Phil. i. 23.

3. The poor man had already heard some of the gracious words which proceeded out of the lips of the Saviour, and he *wanted to hear more*, that he might learn to follow him. Even enemies had said, 'Never man spake like this man:' and his friends would doubtless acquiesce.

The philosophers had their disciples, and the Jewish teachers had theirs; but none of them spake like him.

It was this which attached the primitive disciples to their Lord, and drew forth their hearts after him: this it is which still renders it desirable to be with him. John vi. 68.

4. This prayer might also proceed from a *wish to associate* with those who associated with the Saviour, and who were regarded by him as his brethren.

'Thy people shall be my people,' said Ruth; as well as 'thy God shall be my God.' Those who choose the one, will not fail to choose the other: this is common to all believers.

II. Reasons why the prayer was not granted: "Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee."

It may seem remarkable, that our Lord should decline to gratify a desire which he himself had raised, and to fulfil a petition which in itself appears so reasonable; especially when it is considered, that he granted to the other parties their requests. The devils prayed that they might be permitted to enter into the herd of swine: and he suffered them. The Gadarenes prayed that he himself would depart out of their coast; and he departed. The restored demoniac besought that he might be with him; "but Jesus sent him away"—

Yet this is not the only instance in which holy desires are not fulfilled. The disciples wanted to go with Jesus, when he was about to take his leave of them; but were not suffered. John xiii. 36, 37.

Jesus however did not refuse the prayer of the demoniac, without assigning an important reason, and informing him that he might better serve his interest another way. "Return," says he, "to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee." It appears too, that the man was satisfied with this, and acted accordingly: for "he went his way, and published throughout the whole city, how great things Jesus had done unto him." He not only executed his commission, but exceeded it; telling the tidings not merely to his "own house," but to the "whole city."

Here we may observe—

1. It is not sufficient that our desires arise from a *right principle*; they must also be governed by a right rule, the will of God.

Some seem to suppose, that whatever desire grace may have excited, must needs be fulfilled: but grace may excite an ardent desire for the salvation of others, in a minister, like that of Paul, whose prayer it was that Israel might be saved; and yet that desire, like his, may not be granted.

It was right in him thus to pray, and God approved it, though he did not give him all the desire of his heart. It was the same with David, when he wished to build the temple.

The prayer of the poor demoniac arose from love, but it was love misguided. Christ would approve the motive, but not the thing. It was well that it was in his heart to be with Jesus, but it was better for him to be employed in making known his glory.

2. The servants of Christ must be willing to forego personal comfort for *the sake of public good*.

The present life is not so much a state of high enjoyments, as of active services; and this is the way that love must chiefly operate.

Here we are to enter upon the conflict: when we have overcome, we shall sit down with him on his throne.

3. There is an obligation on all who have found mercy, *to seek to impart it* to their fellow sinners, especially to those of their "own house," and to all who come within their reach. Those who love the Saviour, will be sure to recommend him to others.

4. Our Lord's answer to the prayer of the demoniac, is *not an absolute refusal*, after all; but merely a suspension of his desire.

He should indeed be with him, but not now. All those who desire to be with Christ, and with his people in this world, they shall have their desire granted them at last. They shall be with him where he is, to behold his glory, the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. John xvii. 24.

THE WORK OF PATIENCE.

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.—James i. 4.

All men have their troubles christians also have theirs : but what are all the trials we have ever known, when compared with those of primitive believers? What, when compared with those who in after ages endured persecution?

This epistle was addressed to such as were “scattered abroad” such as had fallen into “divers temptations” and who had to endure “the trying of their faith.” Yet in the text they are exhorted to “patience” much more have *we* reason to exercise it.

Let us endeavour to explain the exhortation—and then notice the influence which patience has on the christian character.

I. Explain the exhortation.

What is “patience”—wherein does its “work” consist—what is it for patience to have its “perfect work”—and what are the principal impediments to its exercise?

1. Enquire what is “patience.”

It is a disposition quietly to endure present ills, in the prospect of future deliverance a stedfast persevering in well-doing, though under the cross being humbled under the mighty hand of God.

There is a kind of quiescence arising from *necessity*, despairing of relief submitting to an inexorable power, and inevitable fate. Of this sort was the patience and fortitude of heathen philosophers that of unbelievers is still the same but christian patience is the patience “of hope” the patience of the husbandman, waiting for the future harvest. James v. 7.

There is also a quiescence arising from *insensibility*, a sort of stoical apathy, or infidel indifference. Christian patience does not require the extinction, but the government of the passions in patience ‘possess ye your souls.’

Wherein does “the work” of patience consist.

Patience is not merely a passive, but an operative principle : it not only bears the cross, but follows Jesus. The work assigned to patience lies chiefly in three departments—

(1) In reference to the *vicissitudes of providence*, it is the work of patience to submit : to prostrate, and adore. Job i. 20, 21. Psalm xxxix. 9.

(2) In regard to the *injuries we receive from men* persecutions reproaches the daily vexations of human life.

These are to be expected in our way to heaven, and will find plenty of work for christian patience. It is more difficult to bear injuries from men, than afflictions from the hand of God ; and the rapid succession of little troubles is a greater trial to patience, than the

sudden occurrence of some great calamity. But it is the work of patience to continue in well-doing amidst it all.

(3) The *suspension of future good*, finds employment for this virtue, nearly as much as the existence of present evil. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Faith confides in the promise, but patience must wait for the performance. Rom. viii. 25.

3. What is it for patience to have its "perfect work."

The term may imply two things—

(1) That the exercise of this disposition should be *habitual* uninterrupted by intervals of murmuring, repining, desponding, or unbelief.

(2) That it be *abiding*, and continue to the end: then its work is "perfect." All its employment lies in this world; it will have nothing to do in the next. It is the vessel to carry us safe through the storm, to land us on Salem's shore, and then its work is done.

4. The *impediments* to its exercise must be avoided.

"Let it have" its perfect work. More ready to get rid of troubles than to profit by them, to avoid the cross than to take it up, we are for taking the work out of the hands of patience, and leave it but little to perform. But *let* it have its perfect work: go not out of the path of duty to avoid trouble. Let troubles come, if they must come, and let God be glorified: ver. 2, 3.

II. Consider the influence which patience has on the christian character: "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

1. Being "perfect" is doubtless here to be taken in a comparative sense, and not absolutely. It is expressive, not of the sinless perfection of the saints in light, but of that beautiful uniformity of character which accompanies great grace in the present world. It is a perfection of parts, rather than of degrees; like an entire human body, where none of its members are wanting, though not arrived to the fulness of the stature of a man. Perfect and entire, "wanting nothing."

The christian character too frequently exhibits a want of *proportion*. Some are apparently devout, but wanting in compassion towards men: others are kind and humane, but deficient in spirituality. Some have zeal without knowledge, and others knowledge without zeal. Some are faithful, but wanting in affection and brotherly kindness: others are tender, but not faithful: serious without cheerfulness, cheerful without gravity. In all there is something wanting, which only a patient continuance in well-doing can supply.

There is also much wanting in the *degree of grace*, even in those who upon the whole preserve a lovely uniformity. If we have something of all the graces, it is but little, and each requires to be strengthened by exercise. We know but in part, we love but in part.

3. If patience have its perfect work, it will tend to *supply these defects*. Eminent characters are generally such as have been

greatly tried, and had much occasion for patience. Sanctified afflictions give maturity to the graces, by making us deeply humble, and habitually prayerful. Where patience has had its perfect work, there all the fruits of righteousness abound. Psal. xcii. 12. Rom. v. 3—5.

Let this reconcile us to adversity, and check our desire after riches and worldly ease.

NECESSITY OF RENEWING GRACE.

For which cause we faint not ; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.—2 Corinthians iv. 16.

In this chapter, Paul speaks much of his own experience ; for they compelled him to vindicate himself. He also mentions his great troubles and how he was supported under them : ver. 8—11, 16.

By the “outward” man is meant the bodily frame, or man considered merely as man. By the “inner man,” the mind, as the subject of divine grace, or man considered as a christian.

The outward man is supposed to perish : it gradually goes to decay, and in the end will be dissolved by death. But the inner man is “renewed day by day :” while nature declines, grace is growing up to maturity, and ripening for glory. While we are growing in years, and feel our outward man fast declining, there is such a thing as growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I. Explain the nature of this daily renewal of the inner man.

The term signifies to make new again, or to restore what was got old, and going to decay.

1. It is sometimes applied to the *first renovation of the mind* in regeneration, as in Titus iii. 5. But in the text it respects our progressive sanctification, as in Rom. xii. 2. Ephes. iv. 23.

2. The *progressive renewal* of the mind may be distinguished into special and common—

(1) There are times of *special* declension, and so of special recovery. These are effected sometimes by the word and ordinances sometimes by the admonitions of friends, or the voice of providence sometimes by the revival of others. Hos. xiv. 7. By some sore affliction, Psal. cxix. 67, or by being left to fall, we are raised up and again restored, as Peter was.

(2) There is also a renewal of the mind which is *common*, and this is more immediately intended in our text. Paul does not mean that he had fallen into any particular declension, so as to require special renewal : he merely speaks of what was daily needful. It is with

the inward, as with the outward man: there are not only special renewals of health and strength, after times of sickness, but common ones.

We are daily strengthened by food and rest: so every time we derive inward strength from reading and hearing the word, or any other spiritual exercise, we are renewed day by day: and this is promised to such as wait upon the Lord. Isai. xl. 31.

These seasons of renewal are less sensible than those which are special and extraordinary, but not less needful. It is by these that the mind is kept in a proper state for working, warring, and suffering; even as the body is sustained by daily food.

II. Observe the necessity of this frequent renewal.

It is implied, that we are always in danger of declining, and of losing our spiritual strength and energy. The mind in its happiest frames is indeed as if it could never forget: yet it does so. The impression of divine truth is soon effaced: hence we are exhorted to stir up our minds by way of remembrance.

* We lose the savour of heavenly things, by being continually conversant with those which are earthly. To-day we feel tender and spiritual, but how soon do we contract hardness of heart and carnality.

Now we have confidence towards God, but again our hearts fail us. Now we are zealous and decided, and then weary in well-doing.

Every day also brings with it fresh troubles, duties, and temptations; so that we need to be renewed in the inner man, day by day.

The Lord never intended that we should have a stock of grace in hand, but that we should be continually dependant upon him: and as we are taught to ask for common food, day by day, so are we to seek spiritual supplies from him, that we may live by every word which proceedeth out of his mouth. Deut. viii. 3. John i. 16.

III. The encouragement we have to pray for it.

God hath both promised renewing grace, and provided it: and his strength shall be made perfect in our weakness. Job xvii. 9. Psal. lxxxiv. 11. Prov. iv. 18. Luke xi. 13. John i. 16.

There are grounds and reasons for our going forward, and advancing in the divine life, rather than declining. The best is yet before us: we are reaching nearer and nearer to the prize every day. Grace is in this respect the reverse of nature: in the latter we continually descend, but in grace we ascend. This shows the possibility of advancing still higher and higher, and God has promised it to them that seek him.

IV. The cause to which this renewing is ascribed.

The apostle mentions a cause or reason why "he fainted not:" and if we would be kept from fainting, let us observe it. If a man prosper in the world, we enquire the cause, that we may go and do likewise.

Faith in the Son of God is that by which we live in the flesh, and by which we receive out of his fullness; and this is given as a medium of

divine support : ver. 13.

Viewing all things as working together for good, is mentioned as another : ver. 17. Looking at the things that are not seen, ver. 18 : faith working in a way of love to God and his people.

These things will bear us up, under all our labours and trials, and should be cherished for that purpose.

Let us learn to look out of ourselves, rather than inward. It is by applying the blessings of the gospel, that the inner man is renewed, and by living upon its doctrines and promises.

Every thing else is going downwards, hastning to an end, and passing away : but grace ascends upwards, and aspires to glory.

CARNAL POLICY IN MATTERS OF RELIGION, INCONSISTENT WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL.

For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-wards.—2 Corinthians i. 12.

It might have been expected, that the apostles in all the churches would have been implicitly obeyed, and their characters revered : yet this was so far from being the case, that Paul had much ado to keep up his credit with the church of Corinth. False teachers endeavoured to raise themselves at his expense ; and for this purpose they insinuated, that Paul was crafty, and ought to be suspected as a designing man. 2 Cor. xii. 16—18. The language of the text is intended to refute the calumny, and the unworthy motives imputed to him are utterly disclaimed.

(1) By “fleshly wisdom” here is meant the wisdom of the world, or that which has carnal and worldly ends in view : or is employed for our own interest, worldly advantage, or personal gratification.

(2) By “the grace of God” is meant that holy wisdom, or line of conduct, which the grace of God teaches us to pursue. It is that “simplicity and godly sincerity” which stands opposed to mere carnal wisdom, and which though imputed to the apostle, he rejected it with abhorrence.

(3) This holy wisdom is that which influenced his conduct, both “in the church and in the world.” It pervaded and regulated all his actions, and is set before us for our imitation.

1. Notice a few cases in which one or the other of these opposite principles will regulate our conduct, or the importance of acting under the influence of that principle which governed the conduct of the apostle, both in the church and in the world.

Mankind in general are guided by one or the other of these principles, though indeed there are some who have no wisdom of any kind ; neither

that which cometh from above, nor that which is of the world. Yet, generally speaking, men are either governed by fleshly wisdom, or by the grace of God.

More particularly—

1. Consider the importance of acting under the influence of holy wisdom, *in the ministry of the word*. It is this which will characterise the subject *matter* of our preaching, and will also influence the *manner* in which the service is performed.

If guided by fleshly wisdom, it will savour of the flesh: it will partake of the wisdom of this world, and not of that which is from above. Our speech and our preaching will be ‘with enticing words of man’s wisdom, and not in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.’ 1 Cor. ii. 4. There will be little or no spirituality in it; but all will be dull, and cold, and lifeless.

But if influenced in this great work by spiritual wisdom, our ministry will savour of Christ, and of heaven, and of the things of God, and not of men. It will be wisdom, but not the wisdom of this world, which cometh to nought. 1 Cor. ii. 6.

One of these opposite principles will also govern our *motives*. If that which is carnal, we shall only study to be approved of men: fame, interest, or applause will be all we seek.

Such sort of characters are often seen to give it out, that they themselves are some great one, like Simon the sorcerer.

But if governed by holy wisdom; the love of God, the love of souls, and the love of Christ will constrain us. We shall not seek your’s, but you.

2. In *reading and hearing the word*, we shall generally be governed by one or the other of these principles.

There is a spirit which is of the world, and a spirit which is of God, 2 Cor. ii. 12: and it is of great importance which of these influence us when we take the word into our hands, or attend upon its ministry.

If governed by “fleshly wisdom,” it will be no wonder if we err, and stumble, and perish. A man may have a great deal of worldly wisdom and learning, so as to be able to criticise every text, and offer some ingenious comments; and yet hold another gospel.

This is especially the case when a system is previously formed, and an appeal afterwards made to the Scriptures in its favour.

But if influenced by “the grace of God,” we shall pray and learn. So, in hearing the word, if we come full of fleshly wisdom, merely to criticise and to judge, whatever the preacher may be, it will do our souls, no good.

But if we come to hear the word as christians, full of “godly simplicity,” it will be to get wisdom by it. Yea, we shall come to hear the word of God, and do it: desiring it as the sincere milk, that we may grow thereby. 1 Peter ii. 1, 2.

3. In conducting *church fellowship and discipline*, we shall be governed by one or the other of these principles, and it will be of great importance to act right.—Particularly,

(1) In receiving persons to *communion*, if influenced by carnal policy, we shall be in danger of acting with partiality; looking rather at the outward appearance, than to the principles of the party. We shall seek the rich, rather than the poor; or be ambitious of numbers; whether rich or poor, rather than seeking to be increased with the in-

crease of God.

But if influenced by holy wisdom, we shall be desirous of souls being brought to Christ, and to see his power and glory in the sanctuary.

(2) In appointing *officers* in the church, it becomes us also to be well aware of the motives which influence our determination. If we act from the former of these principles, it will be in a way of worldly policy : men will be chosen to office merely for their opulence or worldly consequence, or to gratify some personal attachments. But if the latter guide our conduct, we shall keep our eye on the scriptural qualifications required in such a case, and shall act accordingly, regardless of the consequences.

(3) In exercising *discipline* also, if influenced by the former, we shall feel concern only where it may effect our own reputation. But if the latter, it will be for the glory of God, and for the good of the party : it will be from love to the souls of such, and not from any personal consideration.

Finally, if influenced by the former of these principles, our chief concern will be to appear great and respectable. If by the latter, to be conformed to the image of Christ, and to keep his word.

4. In deciding upon a *variety of conduct in the world*, we are generally governed by one or the other of these principles. If by that which is fleshly and carnal, our question in almost all cases will be, Is it wise, or likely to be advantageous to ourselves : or what will the world think or say ? But if the latter, the only enquiry will be, Is it *right* ? Is it for the glory of God, and the good of souls ?

The former is the principle of all worldly societies, and worldly individuals, and also of all mere nominal christians. But the latter is that of all true believers, and such as love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

So in the connections we form in life, and the situations we choose, we shall be influenced by one or other of these principles, and our conduct will be accordingly. If the former motive prevail, we shall desire the well-watered plain : but if the latter, we shall seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

II. Consider the satisfaction arising from the consciousness of our motives being right in the sight of God, and being able to say as Paul in the words of our text.

He speaks of it as a matter of rejoicing, yea, of singular rejoicing—

1. Because the testimony of a good conscience is in some cases *the only testimony* we have in our favour. It was nearly so with Paul at Corinth. The world may be offended with us, and good men may be carried away by the insinuations of the artful and designing : but if we possess this testimony, it will bear us up, as it has done many a godly and faithful minister, amidst a continued storm of persecution, both from the world and from false brethren.

2. The testimony of conscience, thus regulated, *corresponds with the testimony of God himself*. If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. Enoch had this testimony, that he

pleased God, though he pleased not men. This also will make us happy in death, as well as amidst the labours and difficulties of the present life.

Let us learn from hence—

(1) To try ourselves by this rule, and closely to inspect the motives by which our actions are regulated. If our conscience can bear witness for us, we have a powerful advocate.

(2) If governed by the best of principles, it will avail only for ourselves. Your ministers may be pure from the blood of all men, in declaring to you the whole counsel of God; and yet you may perish in your own blood after all! See therefore that you receive the truth in love.

PRIVILEGES OF CHRIST'S FLOCK.

I am the door : by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved ; and shall go in and out, and find pasture.—John x. 9.

Were we to enquire which is the true church ; who are the ministers of Christ, and which is the way of salvation ; we may learn it from this chapter.

The Jews indeed pretended that they only were the people of God ; that their priests were the only ministers, and that salvation was confined to them.

But our Lord shows that those only are the true church which are his sheep, and who enter in by him ; that those only are the true shepherds who believe in him, and lead sinners to him ; and that this is the way of salvation.

I. The character of those who truly belong to the flock of Christ.

They are such as enter in by Christ, “the door” of the sheepfold ; that is, by *faith* in him. Many have entered in by *birth* : they were born in a christian land, and so are called christians. Thus it was with the Jews, who rested on their being the children of Abraham.

Others have entered into the fold by a mere *profession* of christianity ; but coming in by “the door” is essential to our being Christ’s sheep. All professions of religion come to nothing where this is wanting. John xiv. 6.

What is it then to enter in by “the door?” In general, it is to embrace Christ ; to receive the truth in love, and that in three respects—

1. It is to embrace Christ *exclusively*, to the rejection of every other way of salvation. The way of salvation by the cross of Christ, is the great offence to the world ; but he is “the door,” and there is no other way of entering into eternal life. Other things may be dispensed with, but this is indispensable : we may differ in minor matters, and may agree to differ : but ‘what think ye of Christ,’ is a question of vital importance.

This has been the way of salvation from the *beginning*. All the promises made to the fathers included Christ: the promise of the woman's Seed—of the Seed to Abraham, and all nations being blessed in him—the blessings promised to David in the everlasting covenant, had an immediate reference to Christ, and he was the substance of them all.

There is no other way of admission but by *faith in him*, as an atoning Saviour. This was clearly taught by the distinction made in the offerings of Cain and Abel, and this difference was observed throughout the whole of the Mosaic economy. There is no other way *now*: the concurrent language of the new testament is, 'He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.' John iii. 36. 1 John v. 12.

2. It is to embrace Christ *practically*, so as really to "enter in" by the door into the sheepfold. This is to be doers of the word, and not hearers only. Many stand and lie about the door, who never enter in: they think of it, but do not like such a narrow way, or they put it off to some other time. To such however he is still a door of hope, and a refuge to the lost.

3. It implies that we do it *socially*. In entering in by the door, we enter into the fold among the sheep, and become one with God's people.

II. The promise made to such: "they shall be saved."

The great question with a fallen creature is, What shall I do to be saved? And this is the answer: Christ is the way, and you must embrace him as such: there is no other way.

Consider its importance—

1. *We are lost*, whether we be saved or not. As a sheep upon the mountains is lost from the shepherd and the flock, so are we lost; and should never find the way to God, but should wander and perish for ever. Isai. liii. 6. Ezek. xxxiv. 11, 12.

2. If we be not saved, *our loss will be incalculable*. Our sins are upon our head, and we must die in the pit. Other losses may be estimated, but this cannot: what shall a man give in exchange for his soul.

3. *If we be saved*, the good will be inestimable. It is salvation with eternal glory. It includes not only deliverance from all evil, but the enjoyment of all good. 1 Cor. ii. 9.

III. The privileges which such enjoy in this world: "they go in and out, and find pasture."

1. Observe, those who have once entered in by the door into the sheepfold, *will go in again and again*. The same gospel that first quickened us, will quicken us afterwards: the same food that first fed us, will still be our meat and drink. John vi. 64, 68.

2. Those who are in Christ, have *rich pastures* provided for them: the word and ordinances of God's house, and the green pastures in which he leads them for his name's sake. Psal. xxiii. 2. Cant. i. 7. Isai. xlix. 10.

3. They have *free and secure access* to them, under the care of the great Shepherd; who guards their souls from beasts of prey, and will cause them to lie down in safety. Ezek. xxxiv. 13—15.

(1) Let us learn the great importance of coming to Christ, and taking his yoke upon us: let us beware we do not stop short of this.

(2) See to it that our religion has a right beginning; that we enter in by "the door," and in no other way.

DUTY OF MUTUAL FORGIVENESS.

If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.—Matthew vi. 15.

In our Lord's sermon on the mount, the attentive reader must perceive the inculcation of various precepts, by which his followers were to form their character, and regulate their whole deportment; and as he proposes himself for their model and their guide, what he teaches is deserving of peculiar attention. Unless we keep his sayings, we cannot be his disciples. Having instructed them how to pray, he afterwards touches upon one of the petitions, and only one, for the purpose of enforcing the important and necessary duty of forgiveness.

I. Explain the import and meaning of the precept.

The divine Saviour well knew the human heart, and the propensity of mankind to indulge an unforgiving spirit. Anger is a natural passion of the mind, and is not sinful if it be restrained within certain limits: it is sinful only when it meditates revenge. If cherished, or carried to excess, it often seeks the injury or destruction of its object, and produces rancour and malevolence. It is therefore to be repelled, and not suffered to rest in the bosom of a good man, whose proper character is to be meek and lowly in heart. But in perfect consistency with these remarks, we must be permitted to observe,

1. That the precept under consideration, allows injured persons to seek redress in a court of judicature, if they cannot obtain it in any other way; although among christians, it may be hoped, that this expedient is rarely necessary. But as it would be highly improper that society at large, as well as individuals, should hold their property or their character at the will of every depredator, there is no reason why christians should not be equally entitled to legal means of redress.

2. Nor is it contrary to the spirit of this precept to prosecute criminally in certain cases, even though it should terminate in the forfeiture of life itself. The magistrate and the laws are here in the place of God; and even the divine law, which is founded in retributive justice, demands 'blood for blood.' Mercy and forgiveness ordinarily in such a case, would be to sacrifice the good of society to fraud and violence, and to offer an impunity for the perpetration of crime.

3. It is no violation of our Lord's precept to withhold our confidence from a treacherous friend, when that friendship has been violated, and no subsequent repentance manifested.

The case which our Saviour contemplated when he said, 'If thy brother sin against thee until seventy times seven, and he turn again and say I repent, thou shalt forgive him,' is widely different from that under consideration. In this instance forgiveness is limited to a brother's repentance, and includes the complete restoration and cordial acceptance of the offender; but where no compunction is expressed, either by words or actions, the rule will not apply.

4. The precept actually requires the forgiveness of all trespasses, where the good of society and of the individual will permit, and utterly forbids a malevolent or implacable disposition. If we refuse to forgive a slight trespass, can we hope that our Father will forgive us; or that he will regard the prayer that proceeds from such an unfeeling heart? Impossible: nor can such escape the damnation of hell.

II. Endeavour to enforce the exhortation, or show the necessity and importance of mutual forgiveness.

Reason itself proclaims the folly of revenging injuries, and indulging in anger and moroseness; and teaches us to reinforce ourselves with manly resolution against the prevalence of these passions in our breasts. A foundation would otherwise be laid for perpetual warfare, and every man would be armed against his brother. If a person thinks he has a right to retaliate or revenge every injury or insult he has received, a door would be opened to eternal discord and confusion; and the feuds kept up in this way, would make the world to bear an awful resemblance to the infernal regions. Children would revenge the injuries done to their parents, from generation to generation; for as the connection now stands between man and man, no one can be injured alone; his family must suffer with him. There are some indeed, pretending to be men of honour, who consider it as a sort of dignity conferred upon their character, to be able to revenge an injury. But it is no such thing: the most stupid animal or the meanest reptile can resent an injury, or repel the attack of an adversary. Real dignity of mind, on the contrary, will feel superior to the little artifices of revenge; will rise above the dense and putrid exhalations of pride and malice, and soar into the regions of purity and peace. He who suffers his bosom to become the seat of angry passions, will find that he has within him a restless devouring element, a flame that will consume all his peace, and render it as impossible for him to be happy, as for a person to enjoy health while tormented with a burning fever. He becomes the victim of that feeling, the effects of which he intended to inflict upon another, and puts it in the power of vanity or insolence to render him perpetually miserable.

It is unnecessary to dwell on the unreasonableness and inconsistency of indulging a revengeful and implacable disposition, as utterly repugnant to every rational principle, and subversive of individual and social happiness: we will rather advert to higher principles and higher motives,

such as every believer is under the most solemn obligations to obey.

1. The forgiveness of injuries is strictly enjoined, both by the law of Moses and the gospel of Christ.

The former forbids all hatred, malice, or revenge, and requires the performance of kind offices towards the injurious and unthankful.

The latter gives an enlargement to this precept, requiring us to love our very enemies; and our Lord, who well knew how difficult it would be to do good to those who have done us evil, has nevertheless made it the fundamental law of his kingdom. Matt. v. 44, 45.

2. A spirit of forgiveness was eminently illustrated and enforced, by the example of Christ himself, and that of his immediate followers, as the distinguishing characteristic of the gospel dispensation.

What was the Redeemer's errand to the world, but to reconcile sinners unto God, and to make peace by the blood of the cross.

His first command to the disciples, after his resurrection, was that they should go to Jerusalem, and preach forgiveness to his murderers, where he had so lately been crucified and slain. The same spirit has also been manifested by his disciples, in every age of the church. The prayer of the protomartyr, has been the prayer of all his persecuted followers: 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.'

And how then can we be Christ's disciples, if we possess not this spirit?

3. Our own forgiveness is deeply implicated, and even suspended on the condition of a spirit of forgiveness towards others. The words of our Lord are peremptory: "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." How then can we pray for pardon, ere we are ready to forgive; and how can that man be a christian, who cannot devoutly and conscientiously adopt the Lord's prayer?

Yet no one can do this, whose breast is the seat of revenge. All rancorous feelings and dispositions are a total disqualification for the reception of forgiving mercy; and the eternal condemnation of such persons is certain and inevitable, if the testimony of truth itself is to be admitted.

4. An unforgiving temper is utterly repugnant to the whole genius of christianity, which is pre-eminently a dispensation of grace and mercy.

God is here represented as pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin; as doing it abundantly, and showing mercy to the very chief of sinners. And can a man, to whom the Lord has forgiven ten thousand talents, take his brother by the throat for every trivial offence? If he can, he is in danger of being bound hand and foot, and cast into hell fire.

5. A rancorous disposition is alike contrary to the dictates of the Holy Spirit, and will infallibly deprive us of his presence and influence.

'He that hateth his brother walketh in darkness,' and in darkness he must abide, so long as he fosters a spirit of malignity. The Holy Spirit cannot take up his abode in such a heart; that sacred dove is scared away by discord and contention, and cannot dwell with such unholy company. 'God is love;' and all that is contrary to this principle, is opposed to him.

6. Remember the near approach of death, and how impossible it will be to meet this 'last enemy,' under the influence of an unforgiving spirit.

Do you intend to die in malice ; and if you do, are you so infatuated as to hope for happiness? If you intend to relinquish all hostility, and to pardon an offending brother, before that awful crisis, such an opportunity may never arrive. You know not how soon his summons may be given, nor in what circumstances he may be placed : but they may be such as to render your condemnation final and inevitable. ‘Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him.’ Matt. v. 25.

Let this subject teach us to guard against the first risings of anger, and to quench the embers of contention and strife. ‘The gospel breathes a spirit of benignity and love, and ‘he that hateth his brother abideth in death.’

CHRIST’S FAREWELL TO HIS DISCIPLES.

A little while and ye shall not see me : and again, a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.—John xvi. 16.

This is part of the last tender discourse of our Lord to his disciples, which was omitted by the other Evangelists, but is given us by John. His design throughout the whole of his address is to reconcile their minds to his departure, and to arm them against future troubles. Such also is the kind intention in the words of our text.

Our Lord’s meaning, however, was not plain to the disciples ; for they did not fully understand him. He therefore took occasion to explain himself ; and the explanation extends to ver. 27.

I. Endeavour to illustrate the subject—

In general, it has a double aspect, a dark side, and a bright one—

1. Notice *the dark part* of the subject. Our Lord’s first sentence seems plainly to refer to his death : “ye shall not see me.” In the course of five or six days at most he would be taken from them, and they would be left alone. His farther explanation of this is given in ver. 20 : they should “weep and lament.” This indeed they did, not only as having lost him whom their souls loved, but as being nonplused as to all their future hopes and prospects. Their feelings must have been what ours would be, if something were to transpire which would seem to prove that there was nothing true in religion.

They walked about, not knowing what to do with themselves : they communed, and were sad. Luke xxiv. 21. While this was the case, the world triumphed, the enemy rejoiced, and were ready to say, See now what is become of your Messiah—where now is your God !

2. Let us view *the bright part* of the subject.

Though the

situation of the disciples was very painful, it should not be of long continuance: "a little while and ye shall see me." Does he mean at his resurrection? It would seem so but for the last clause, and the context—"because I go to the Father."

If it be understood of their seeing him with their bodily eyes after his resurrection, his going to the Father would rather be a reason of the reverse, as in ver. 10. It is not therefore with their bodily eyes that they were to behold him, though that was true for a little time, but with the eyes of their mind which from that time should be greatly irradiated: on his departure a flood of light should be poured upon them.

In confirmation of this sense of the passage, the enjoyment promised was to remain with them: "no man shall take it from you." The whole context agrees with this construction: when the eyes of their understanding were opened, this promise was fulfilled.

3. Observe *the similitude* by which the whole subject is illustrated, ver. 21, 22.

The joy that should follow on Christ's going to the Father should be so great, that it should make them forget as it were their sorrow.

The little church of Christ was then like a woman in travail: it was also the hour of Christ's travail, and they must be in travail with him.

But when they come to see the fruits of all, they remember no more the anguish. Their natural attachments to him after the flesh, were henceforth swallowed up in spiritual and holy joy. 2 Cor. v. 16.

4. The *advantages* arising from Christ's going to the Father, are also exhibited for the purpose of reconciling the disciples to his departure, ver. 23—27.

There are three things in particular respecting our Lord's departure, that are worthy of notice—

(1) Our being allowed and directed henceforward to *make use of his name* in our approaches to the Father. While he was upon earth, the disciples presented all their requests to him; or if to the Father, no special mention was made of the name of Jesus.

But now, after his soul had been made an offering for sin, his name shall be the plea: and thus we are furnished with a plea the most powerful and efficacious.

(2) *A flood of light* was from hence poured upon the church. A fulfilment of the prophecies would elucidate the various important events that had taken place, and the Holy Spirit was also given them in great abundance.

(3) *Christ's intercession* on our behalf is also promised as one of the benefits consequent on his departure, ver. 26, 27: and hence the comfort it was intended to impart.

II. Apply the subject to ourselves.

1. We may expect, in common with the disciples of Jesus, to have *a portion of tribulation*, or a time to weep and lament. There are also special times for this, and when the world rejoice: times when the cause of Christ seems to be run down and going to ruin, through persecutions from without, or contentions from within. The whole of the christian life is in some degree a time of weeping and

mourning, while the men of the world appear to be cheerful and happy.

2. We may take comfort in this, it is *but for a little time*. At most it cannot be long, and God shortens many of our sorrows even here.

The disciples did not leave the world, till they had their sorrow turned into joy; and we may also live to see many of our troubles end. Psal. xl. 1.

3. It is our duty and happiness to *believe the promise*, without knowing how it shall be accomplished.

The disciples knew not how, but they were told that their sorrow should be turned into joy, and it was so.

We know not the ways of this world, nor the ways of God, and less still of the world to come: yet we are required to believe.

4. All the advantages arising from Christ's going to the Father, *apply to us* as well as to the primitive disciples; and it is our duty and interest to avail ourselves of them.

To make use of Christ's name, in praying for our own souls, or for his cause; to walk by the light which is now shed abroad, to pray for large measures of the Holy Spirit; and to take encouragement from his intercession to pray for spiritual blessings, assured that him the Father heareth always.

What an awful reverse to all this, is the state of the unbelieving sinner. John xii. 35.

THE DENIAL OF OUR SINFUL STATE, A VIRTUAL REJECTION OF THE GOSPEL.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.—1 John i. 10.

John, while imparting the message of the gospel, introduces two kinds of principles as of great importance—

(1) The glorious character of God: ver. 5. And as he proceeds he tries other principles by that; both his own religion, and the religion of all other persons: ver. 6, 7.

(2) He then mentions another of the great principles of the gospel, and that is, the depraved and ruined state of man. He then tries our religion by this.

The text supposes that the whole tenor of the gospel proceeds upon the principle, that men are sinners: he therefore who denies this, denies the gospel, and so makes God a liar.

The truth here taught us is, that the denial of our sinful state contains in it a virtual rejection of the gospel.

In order to see the force of this sentiment, let us notice some of the ways in which we may be said to deny that we have sinned, and how such implied denial tends to subvert the gospel.

Few persons will deny the fact in words; for conscience tells men that they are sinners, and they cannot easily avoid the conviction; but it is the holding of certain principles which virtually tends to this denial.

I. Some deny the moral government of God, and man's accountability, and by doing this they subvert the gospel.

If God has forsaken the earth, and left men to do as they like or as they can, and will never call them to an account, then the gospel is not true. This is the way that one part of the world take to keep themselves easy: they will not be reproved, nor charged with sin: our lips are our own, and with them will we prevail. It is no wonder that such should reject the gospel as an imposture; and there are great multitudes of these in the world. Many indeed will openly avow it: and others who do not, really act upon this principle. They are men who care nothing about God, nor about eternity.

II. By overlooking the divine law as extending to the heart, there is in effect a denial that we have sinned, and so the gospel is rejected.

Paul did this, while blinded to the spirituality of the law. The great body of mankind do the same, who think of nothing but their outward conduct. Many consider their moral inability as having released them from all obligation to love God; but this is in effect to deny that they are sinners. Paul's hopes of justification were those of all other self-righteous characters, yet it is impossible that we should be saved in this way. We may call ourselves christians and yet know nothing aright. From a spirit of self-righteousness also arises the notion of sinless perfection, which tends equally to subvert the gospel.

III. By disowning the corruption of our nature, we contradict in effect the testimony of God.

Some consider sin as what is only contracted by imitation and not as natural or inherent; as though the nature of man were pure, but became tainted by example. Christ came to deliver us from the curse, from the ruins of the fall; but if we are not ruined, we need no redemption, and the doctrine of redemption is not true. The fall of man and redemption by Christ go together: if we are not exposed to death by the one, we can not obtain life by the other. Hence the denial of original sin is generally followed with a denial of the divinity of Christ and the atonement. Even a partial view of the subject of human depravity, tends to subvert the gospel. If we be not utterly depraved, the gospel is not true, for Christ came to save the lost and undone, the accursed; not to mend or improve, but to new create.

IV. By denying the evil of sin, or extenuating it in any way, the same consequences follow.

It was in this way that sin at first began to operate, Gen. iii. 12; and the fallen sons of Adam still endeavour to lay the blame of all upon their Maker. They palliate the evil of their conduct by pleading the influence of education, the custom of the country, or gene-

ral example ; the necessity of the case, or the force of constitutional tendencies : or they cover their iniquities by specious names. Hence pride is called dignity of mind, and covetousness passes under the name of prudence. But all this subverts the gospel ; and while these things remain, we shall never cordially embrace it.

V. Coming to God in any other way than by faith in a Mediator.

This is in effect to say that we have "not sinned," and so to subvert the gospel. Cain thought of coming without a sacrifice, and judged it sufficient to present the fruits of the ground as a thank-offering.

So sinners who come to God in their own name, depending on their own resolutions, prayers, and good works, are acting on the same principle, and virtually reject the gospel.

VI. A mere superficial confession and repentance for sin, is in effect a denial of our guilty state.

To confess sin in words, while there is no sense of its evil nature, carries in it a principle that is subversive of the foundations of christianity.

Many will use very strong language in confessing their unworthiness, calling themselves great sinners, and miserable sinners ; and yet feel nothing of the plague of their own hearts, but consider sin as a misfortune, rather than a fault.

There is no genuine humiliation before God on account of it, nor any application to Christ for deliverance from it ; neither indeed can there be any faith in him, where this is the case.

Many also make general acknowledgments of their sinfulness, and of their being sinners, who yet disown their sins in detail, and think little of the evil they commit. But all such characters are liable to the change exhibited in our text.

(1) We learn from hence, the great importance of knowing our true state as sinners. It was this which constituted the principal difference between the pharisee and the publican. God has shown us our sinful state in many ways : by his holy law—by the cross of Christ.

All the sins we commit are only the eruptions of that mass of depravity which lies concealed within.

(2) In all our thoughts of sin, let us dwell upon it only in connexion with the Saviour : true repentance fixes its eyes upon the cross.

CHRISTIAN HOPE AND CONSOLATION.

*I know whom I have believed,*and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*—2 Timothy i. 12.

Paul was at this time a prisoner at Rome, and in the immediate prospect of martyrdom. But he was not ashamed of the cause in which he suffered, nor afraid of death in its most terrific forms: ch. i. 8. iv. 6. Oh how enviable was his situation! Some men desire to die great, that their names may live; or rich, that their families may be distinguished. But after all, who would not join with Balaam here; ‘Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!’

The general import of the words before us is, that Paul well knew the ground on which he stood, and felt satisfied in it.—He does not speak of himself as an apostle, but as a christian; and therefore what he says is applicable to all who believe in Jesus.

1. View the ground of the christian’s hope and consolation; “I know whom I have believed”—

Paul stood firm and happy here, and many others have done the same: let us see wherein this confidence consists—

1. It arises from *a consciousness* that we believe in Christ, and have committed our souls into his hands, as a sacred trust until that day.

Much is made of faith in the Scriptures; and what is it? It is to give credit to, or to receive the testimony of another; and as the testimony of Jesus respects himself as the only way of salvation, we cannot credit him without confiding or trusting in him. The words of Paul therefore are the same as if he had said, ‘I know whom I have trusted.’ We may believe the testimony of Peter or Paul, but Christ alone is the object of our confidence: hence it is explained by “committing” a trust into his hands.

Can you not remember *the time* when first convinced of your guilty and undone condition, and of salvation being in no other; and when you first began to trust in him and commit all to him? Or if not the time, you are conscious that you have *no other hope*: it is not once only, but often, that you have committed your soul into the hands of the Saviour.

2. This comfort arises from the persuasion that *Christ is al sufficient* for the purposes for which you have reposed your trust in him. The text does not so much relate to the act, as to the object of faith. Paul was not thinking so immediately of his believing, though of that he was conscious, as of him in whom he believed: and this is the principal source of consolation,

It greatly concerns us to know in whom we have put our trust: none but real christians enjoy this satisfaction. Others do not know where their trust is: they trust in they know not what, and know not

whom. Some in their idols, some in departed saints, others in their own supposed goodness: but all this is trusting in they know not what, and know not whom.

Let us then consider Jesus, and his *alsufficiency*, as the exclusive ground of the Christian's hope—

(1.) It is that Saviour to whom *all the prophets* have borne witness: the Seed of the Woman, the Seed of Abraham—the Son of David.

He of whom Isaiah wrote, whose glory he foresaw, and whose sufferings he foretold. John xii. 41. Acts x. 43. Rom. ix. 5. 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

(2) Jesus is that Saviour in whom *all the godly* in all ages have put their trust, and have looked to him alone for salvation. Acts iv. 12. Heb. xi. 13.

All the martyrs, all the good men we have ever known, put their trust in this almighty Saviour; and it affords the highest satisfaction to feel ourselves on the same ground.

(3) It is him who in the fulness of time came into the world, and lived and *died for us*. This is the foundation that God hath laid in Zion, and our hopes are founded on a rock. 1 Cor. iii. 11. 1 Pet. ii. 6.

(4) A Saviour who may be depended on for *his alsufficiency* to save. His proper divinity renders him the object of our highest confidence: “He is able to keep that which we commit to him.”

He also has an acquired ability, and an official authority, to save unto the uttermost, all that come unto God by him. Heb. vii. 25.

(5) He is one that may be depended on for *his veracity* and truth. You may safely trust him, for he is the Amen, the faithful and true Witness.

We know whom we have trusted: trust in him, oh ye perishing sinners.

(6) He is one *whose love* is equal to his power. What he can do he will do.

He speaks with great affection to those who have committed themselves to him. They are given to him of God, as well as by their own voluntary surrender: and of this sacred charge he says, ‘I will lose nothing, but will raise it up at the last day.’

He will also present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. John vi. 39. Jude 24.

II. The importance of enjoying this consolation under all the trials of life, and more especially in the near approach of death.

Paul felt it in his imprisonment, and therefore he was “not ashamed;” and as one who was now ready to be offered up, he knew whom he had trusted.

1. If the ground we stand on be *not firm*, at death we must sink for ever. It is dreadful to be at a loss then, not knowing in whom we have believed, or where we have placed our trust.

2. Death often comes *unawares*, or if not, that is not a time for thought. Our house requires to be set in order, but much more our souls to be committed into safe hands.

3. Where this is the case, death is disarmed of its terrors, and we may join in the song of victory. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

SORROWS OF OLD AGE.

The clouds return after the rain.—Ecclesiastes xii. 2.

Solomon was a great king, and he entered into the true spirit of his office. He considered himself as the father of his people: hence in addressing himself to them, he often calls them his children. ‘My son,’ says he, ‘give me thine heart, and let thine eye observe my ways.’

This book was written in old age, and is addressed to youth, especially this chapter. In ver. 1, he appeals to their ingenuousness, and tenderly cautions them against putting off the concerns of religion to a distant period, and offering to the Lord the mere refuse of life. In the following verse he describes the disadvantages of old age, and the gloom attending it, by a general eclipse of nature. If the sun shines, it seems to shine in vain, and there is a perpetual cloud of darkness. One trouble quickly follows another; and when one cloud is gone, another soon succeeds, and life is like a gloomy winter’s day.

1. Notice some of the afflictions and miseries of old age.

Man is born to trouble, and sorrow is his portion in the present world, yet there are troubles peculiar to certain periods of life.

Some are attendant upon childhood; though they are but few.

There are others which accompany youth; for as the heart becomes susceptible of attachment, it is susceptible of pain and grief, and in some cases to a very high degree.

There are troubles also which attend persons of riper years, especially when they begin to plunge into the cares of life; perplexing circumstances, unhappy connections, and a variety of other evils.

But there are sorrows peculiar to old age: let us consider some of their principal sources.

1. At this period of life there is a considerable *abatement in the flow of animal spirits*, and therefore the relish for natural enjoyments becomes almost extinct.

Many things which afforded pleasure in younger years, give no pleasure now. Bodily exercise, planting, building, forming and executing plans, acquiring knowledge, business, company, and social joy.

But now a spirit of enterprise is lost, and these things are rather an affliction than a comfort. ‘I said of laughter, it is mad:’ ver. 3, 4. Hence it was that old Barzillai wished not to follow the king. 2 Sam. xix. 35.

2. The relish of natural enjoyments being lost, *the common troubles of life become less tolerable*, having less to balance them against.

Young people can bear troubles, and weather the storm. They will betake themselves to some enjoyment, and forget their sorrows; or if they cannot wholly do this, they live in hope that time will wear them away.

But in old age the mind sinks, troubles lay faster hold, and a kind of despair is felt, that they never shall be much otherwise: ver. 5.

3. In younger years our sorrows are chiefly confined to ourselves,

but in old age we have often to bear *the sorrows of others*. Youth is the time for forming connections, old age the time to have them dissolved.

Children whom we have nourished and rejoiced in, are now grown up and have entered or are entering upon life. Some of them perhaps are unhappily connected, and oppressed with poverty; or what is worse, are become children of Belial, and know not the Lord.

Jacob had hardships at Padanaran, exposed to frost and heat; but these were very different from the troubles of his old age; the conduct of his children was the greatest of all his troubles.

It was the same with David: what he met with in his own family was far worse than all the persecutions of Saul.

4. It is at this period of life that those *seeds of sin and folly*, sown in the days of youth, generally spring up and come to maturity.

Many have had cause to say, 'Thou makest me to possess the iniquity of my youth.'

Disobedience to parents is often punished by the disobedience of children, and the neglect of family government by family ruin.

David had his troubles in early life; but oh what trouble and anguish when Amnon was slain, when Absalom rebelled! These were the clouds of his old age, that returned and returned, after the rain.

II. Improve the subject.

This was Solomon's design, as appears in ver. 1, and let us carefully attend to it.

1. If we have never remembered God before we are old, *it is seldom the case that we do so then*. We have lost the best part of our time; and after the flower of life is gone, there is but little hope of conversion and salvation. Perhaps not one in twenty has been known to be converted after thirty or forty years of age. The Lord desires the first ripe fruit, the womb of the morning, and the dew of youth.

2. If we should be called in old age, it will be matter of grief to us that we have only *the refuse of life* to offer to the Lord. We can engage in no active services, can do little or nothing for his glory. The first fruits are gone to the service of sin, and nothing remains but the gleanings of the vintage.

3. If we be destitute of the true knowledge of God at this period, *we shall be truly miserable*. Oh aged sinner, to die a hundred years old, and to die accursed! Isai. lxxv. 20. This cloudy day will end in a darker night, in an eternal night.

4. If we possess the knowledge of God, and are *now ripening for glory*, it will more than counterbalance all the sorrows of our former life. The clouds will soon be scattered, and the light of glory break in upon our souls. The outer man may perish, but the inner man will be renewed day by day. Heart and flesh may fail, but God will be the strength of our heart, and our portion forever. We shall bring forth fruit in old age, and still be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright, and that there is no unrighteousness in him. Psal. xcii. 14. lxxiii. 25. 2 Cor. iv. 16.

BAPTISM.

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost: for the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.—Acts ii. 38—41.

We here see the apostles in a very interesting situation, making their first general attack on the kingdom of darkness; opening their commission which Jesus gave them at his ascension, and ‘beginning at Jerusalem.’

There were several important circumstances which attended the commencement of the apostolic mission. (1) It was preceded by prayer: ch. i. 12—14.

(2) By intimate union among themselves: ii. 1.

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The people beholding these things, some doubted, and others were filled with reproach; and this gives occasion for Peter’s address in the words of our text.

The effect is, the murderers of Christ are pricked to the heart, and are exhorted to be baptized.

1. Offer some explanatory remarks upon the text.

1. They are exhorted to *repent*, and this previous to their being baptized.

Repentance is not a mere *reformation* of conduct, for that would not have been connected with “the remission of sins.”

Nor does it consist merely in being *alarmed* at the consequences, for they were already in a state of alarm.

But it denotes a *change of heart*, sorrow for having sinned, not in that instance only, but in every other, though conviction might begin with that. It was a spiritual and evangelical repentance which the apostle required, such as is connected with faith in Christ and the remission of sins, and such as John preached. Acts xix. 4.

This exhortation does not merely point out what was their immediate duty: it also contains an intimation of mercy.

The fallen angels were not so admonished when they had sinned, but were pronounced accursed: and if we also had been left under the curse, there would have been no place for repentance.

2. They are next exhorted to be *baptized*.

Baptism is a solemn institution of Christ, by which we profess his name, and acknowledge ourselves to be his. It was therefore exhorting them to become his disciples, and to make an open profession of their love to him, even as they had formerly avowed their enmity against him.

They were required to believe in him, to own him as their Lord, and to

but in old age we have often to bear *the sorrows of others*. Youth is the time for forming connections, old age the time to have them dissolved.

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They were required to believe in him, to own him as their Lord, and to

take his yoke upon them.

It was also an act of obedience, to prove their faith in Jesus, and their love to him. Our submission to this ordinance must also be performed in obedience to the same authority.

3. Be baptized *every one of you*, is the divine command. Every one that heard the gospel was exhorted to repent, and every one that repented was commanded to be baptized.

We here see that it is not left as a matter of discretion, much less of indifference; but baptism is binding on all those who are the subjects of repentance and of faith.

Some indeed admit it to be a duty to those who *see* it to be so: but they think that is all.

True indeed it is, that a blind obedience is not required; but that those who profess the gospel should read and understand, and obey from the heart the precepts which it inculcates.

4. This obedience is to be performed *in the name of the Lord Jesus*.

This denotes not so much the form of administration, as the authority on which it rests, and at the same time points out the medium of salvation.

Christ is Lord of the church, and of the souls of men; and what is done in religion is to be to his glory, and from regard to his authority.

5. Baptism is to be attended to, for *the remission of sins*.

When Paul was converted, it was said to him, 'Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins;' not literally, as if it possessed such a virtue in itself; but in the same sense, as we are said to 'eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ,' in the sacred supper.

Baptism was a sign of forgiveness, and an emblem of the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.

The real and only ground of forgiveness is the atonement of Christ; and this is intimated in their being baptized in his name, as in chap. x. 43.

6. They shall receive *the gift of the Holy Spirit*: this was extraordinary.

They should receive that very blessing of which they doubted and wondered—the spirit of prophecy: ver. 16, 17.

7. The promise is *to you and your children*. This was the encouragement addressed to the primitive converts, and the same is addressed to us—

(1) Observe, the *promise* refers not to that which was made to Abraham, which included all his spiritual seed; but to that mentioned by Joel, and which is referred to in ver. 16, 17; compared with Joel ii. 28.

(2) The term *children* here does not mean infants, but adults, the "sons and daughters that should see visions, and prophesy;" that is, the Jewish posterity; as when we speak of the 'children of Israel,' we do not mean the infant offspring of Jacob, but all his descendants in the times of Moses.

(3) That which rendered the promise so peculiarly seasonable now was, that it stood against *the curse* which they had so awfully imprecated: 'his blood be on us and on our children.' Being pricked to their hearts, they might now think that the curse was coming upon them.

(4) While it encouraged the penitent Jews, it also excluded their national prejudices and vanity; for the promise was to them that were *afar off*, among the gentiles, as well as to them that are nigh.

(5) The whole, whether to Jews or gentiles, is restricted to *as many*

as the Lord should call. This promise therefore cannot apply to any who are not called.

8. With many other words did Peter exhort his hearers to *save themselves* from that generation. Repentance for sin, faith in Christ, and being baptized in his name, is the way in which they were to "save themselves:" not as authors of their own salvation, yet as being active in fleeing for refuge, as Lot did out of Sodom, or as the manslayer from the avenger of blood.

9. It is added, "Then they that gladly received his word *were baptized*," though probably not all who were pricked in their hearts: for there might be many left, and we still see various characters in whom convictions have not this issue. True faith is receiving the word with gladness; not merely having the truth forced upon the conscience, but the heart open to receive it, and that with cordial approbation and inward joy.

II. Draw some conclusions from the subject.

1. Observe, that God's truth sometimes finds its way to *men's consciences*, and that only: but this is not conversion. It is not enough to be pricked to the heart: we must repent and believe the gospel.

Many rest in their convictions, and too many preachers give encouragement to such, as if these were evidences of grace. But not so with Peter, nor Paul and Silas, when they addressed the convicted and trembling jailor. Acts xvi. 31.

2. If we truly repent and believe the gospel, we must prove *the sincerity* of our faith by taking the yoke of Christ upon us, and keeping his commands.

It is a sad way of reasoning, that because we believe, we need not therefore obey; and that because baptism is not essential, we may therefore be saved without it.

3. The argument from the text, in favour of *infant baptism*, is utterly groundless; for 'as many' as received the word were baptized, and such only.

4. We learn the satisfaction there is in following the example of *primitive christians*, in keeping the commands of our Saviour. This has the promise of his abiding presence. Matt. xxviii. 20.

THE SECOND ADVENT.

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ—Titus ii. 13.

It is one of the great peculiarities of the gospel, that it has brought life and immortality to light, presenting us with views and prospects beyond the grave, which would otherwise have been inconceivable to the human mind. The present world and the future are placed in continual con-

trast; the vanity of the one is depicted, to detach our minds from it, the glory and duration of the other, to draw our affections to eternal objects. In proportion as the former acquires an ascendancy, we 'live by sight;' and as the other gains a superiority, we 'live by faith.'

The event contemplated by the apostle, with a view to promote a life of godliness and spirituality, is the second appearance of Jesus Christ, who is here denominated "the great God and our Saviour." A visible appearance is never ascribed to the Father: on the contrary, he is eminently distinguished as the 'invisible' God—the King immortal, 'invisible'—whom 'no man hath seen, or can see.' But whenever a divine appearance is announced in the Scriptures, it is that of the Son of God, who was 'with our fathers in the wilderness,' previous to his carnation.

It need not surprise any one, that our Saviour is here stiled "the great God;" for if 'he who built all things is God,' surely he by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made, is, with infinite propriety, so denominated. Heb. iii. 4. John i. 3.

The second advent is here presented under a twofold aspect; one referring to the Saviour, and the other to his people. With respect to Christ himself, his second appearance will be "glorious," and with respect to his people, it will be the consummation of their "hope," the sum of all their blessedness.

I. The second coming of Christ will be truly "glorious."

1. It will be so, in contradistinction to the appearance he made on earth, in the days of his flesh, and even his appearance to the disciples after his resurrection.

We are not now permitted to behold the Saviour, or to put our hand into the hole of his side, as Thomas did, in order to believe in him; yet a superior blessedness is pronounced on such as have 'not seen, and yet have believed.'

He is now in a state of invisibility; but ere long he will come forth in glorious majesty, and the unbelieving world shall 'wail, because of him.' They will then see that he is "the great God," and that the object of his appearance is to take vengeance on them that have not obeyed the gospel. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

2. His first appearance was limited to a very few, but this will be visible to all.

The scene of his former advent was the Jewish nation, an inconsiderable and obscure people, forming only a small minority of the human race; and by these he was for the most part rejected. 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not.'

There were only a few who 'beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' And even they beheld it through a veil, and not as it were face to face; for he came to make this world the scene of his humiliation, and not of the full manifestation of his glory. A glimpse of it was seen just before his crucifixion, when he was proclaimed a king, and entered Jerusalem in triumph; but it was that of lowly majesty, seated upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.

His second coming will be with power and great glory; his appearance will be like lightning, diffusing itself over all the earth, and piercing the darkest recesses of nature. He will come

in his own glory as the Son of God, and with the glory he achieved by his humiliation.

He will come in the glory of the Father, as his Executor, to judge the world in righteousness; to execute the threatenings of the Lawgiver, and fulfil the promises of the Saviour.

He will appear as a King, with a retinue of 'mighty angels;' making his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. If when the law was given at Sinai by the ministration of angels, the fire and smoke so filled the people with awe and dread; what will be the manifestation of the Son of God, when he shall come in the glory of his Father and of all the holy angels, to consign angels, men, and devils, to their everlasting abodes.

3. At his first coming he took on him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh; he will now appear as the Sovereign of the universe, and assert his dominion over all. To him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. No man, no combination of persons, will then be able to resist his authority, or reject his government.

He will execute universal judgment, the highest act of a sovereign; and all mankind will be filled with the deepest awe, such as becomes those who wait their final sentence. The wicked will call upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. They will then perceive that the great day of his wrath is come, and feel themselves unable to stand before him. When he judged Jerusalem in the days of his flesh, he was a 'refiner's fire, and as fuller's soap:' but now he will execute judgment without mercy. The year of his redeemed is come, and the day of vengeance, which had so long been in his heart.

It will not only be a glorious appearance, but as it might be rendered, 'an appearance of glory,' a glory that shall be conspicuous. There is a glory which belongs to God, in manifesting his benignity, his mercy and compassion: but this will be a display of that glory which belongs to his vindictive character: and who can tell the power of his anger!

II. This glorious appearance of the Saviour is anticipated by the christian, and connected with a "blessed hope."

Unbelievers may have a faint hope, that what relates to the second appearance of Christ is not true; but it is an event which real christians are ardently "looking for," and are waiting for the Son of God from heaven. They would not forego these expectations, nor have a veil thrown over their prospects, for a throne, or an empire, or a world. They are all their salvation, and all their desire: to be looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, is their constant employment, and their highest joy. The great High Priest is now within the veil, making intercession, while his people stand praying without, waiting for his appearance; and to them only that look for him will he appear the second time, without a sin-offering, to accomplish their salvation. 1 Thess. i. 10. Heb. ix. 28.

The second coming of Christ is to his people a "blessed hope," calculated to fill the mind with joy unspeakable and full of glory, though

only a small part of it can be realised by us in the present state. The object is so great and magnificent as to sink and overwhelm every other; and owing in part to our depravity, and in part to the limited extent of our faculties, we are unable for any length of time to fix our attention upon it, or to form any adequate conceptions of its reality or its grandeur.

Though the blessed at death, enter immediately on a state of felicity, yet that state is not perfected till the resurrection in the last days. Though infinitely removed from the imperfection of the present world, they are still far below the glory that shall succeed at the second coming of Christ; and this it is that fired the mind of the apostle, and filled him with such ardent expectations, amidst all his labours and sufferings. Rom. viii. 18—25. Phil. iii. 13, 14.

The reasons and grounds of this hope cannot now be enumerated: but in the expectation of such an event, it is of importance to enquire what we think of Christ, as no character can be so interesting to us as that of our Judge. He is the “great God and our Saviour:” can you then contemplate him as your Saviour, as well as your Judge? Do you labour and pray, that whether present or absent, you may be accepted of him; and renouncing all your own righteousness, desire above all things to be found in him at that day? Phil. iii. 8, 9.

Let those who are “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,” remember what purity, what watchfulness, what circumspection belongs to such an exalted profession. And seeing ye look for such things, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness. 2 Pet. iii. 11—14.

THE BELIEVER'S BLESSED HOPE.

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.—Titus ii. 13.

It has already been observed, that the whole of this passage is to be understood of Christ, appearing in his glory at the last day; and the verse following the text shows that this interpretation is just. It has also been remarked, that the great event here contemplated, includes two specific objects—the manifestation of the Saviour's glory, and the blessed hope of all his people.

“Hope” is here to be considered objectively, as having eternal life in view. It may well therefore be accompanied with the epithet ‘blessed;’ for it is what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive. The Scriptures have indeed given us some faint representations of the eternal world, as a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arises in our hearts; but still we can only enter the portals, and see as through a glass darkly, little of its grandeur and magnificence.

I. Consider some of the reasons which render eternal life an object of intense desire to all real Christians.

1. The resurrection of the body, which distinguishes its commencement, is included in the prospect. We naturally shrink from dissolution, or a separation of soul and body; a transformation which cannot be contemplated without horror and dread. But the resurrection, which is one of the peculiar discoveries of the gospel, one of its fundamental doctrines, is so abundantly attested and confirmed by the resurrection of Christ, that the re-union of the component parts of our nature is rendered a matter of absolute and infallible certainty, and may be anticipated with holy joy and exultation. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. Until this period arrives, a part of the temple of the Holy Ghost lies in ruins, a part of the curse denounced on man remains uncanceled. Until the resurrection, the enemies of Christ will not be completely vanquished; but that event will go to destroy death, and him that hath the power of it, that is, the devil. The saints shall be rescued from the iron barriers of the tomb, and rise into immortal health and beauty. The bodies of frail mortality, oppressed with various maladies, from which the most eminent are not exempt, shall then be raised in power, and put on incorruption. With these prospects in view, every believer may adopt the triumphant language of the patriarch: 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.'

2. All the causes of evil will for ever be excluded from that state of blessedness, and this therefore renders it an object of desire. There shall be no more pain, neither sorrow nor crying, for the former things are passed away. The inhabitants shall never say, I am sick; there shall be no more curse, and therefore no more death. Those bodies, once subject to pain and disease, shall now become the seat of felicity and joy. The holy martyrs, who were tortured upon the rack, or consumed by devouring fire; those poor and oppressed members of Christ, who, during their abode on earth, went through much tribulation; shall look back on their afflictions and conflicts, as a shipwrecked mariner looks back upon the wreck from which he has escaped; or as the Israelites looked back upon the Egyptians, when they sunk like lead in the mighty waters. They will feel an ecstasy of joy surpassing that which inspired the breasts of the Israelites, on hearing Moses say, 'your enemies which you see to day, you shall see no more for ever.' The saints will look back upon their trials, as evils which exist only in recollection; and to heighten the transport, they will remember that they have overcome by the word of their testimony, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

3. The heavenly state is an object of desire, because all good men will there be perfectly restored to the likeness of God. Their language now is, 'I will behold thy face in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.' Here at the best they ex-

perience much languor and coldness in their devotion, and are continually saying, Who shall deliver me from the body of this death. They have frequently to gird up their garments, lest they should contract defilement; but there all these fears will subside. As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly; the lineaments of the Saviour will be portrayed on every countenance, and his spirit live and breathe in every heart. He who has begun to create us anew by regenerating grace, will complete the transformation, and put the last finish to his own work. There will be no shades of character; all the redeemed shall be unblamable in holiness; their whole body, soul, and spirit will be completely and for ever sanctified.

4. When Christ shall appear in his glory, all his people will be admitted to the vision of God. When we endeavour to contemplate the divine character, it is seldom that we can dwell upon it long together, the subject is so vast and stupendous. In the present state we neither possess a sufficient degree of spirituality, or mental ability; but when the attributes of God engage our meditation, we are soon lost and bewildered, and cannot long retain a subject of which we can form no adequate or distinct conception; and feel ourselves repelled from the investigation, rather than invited to proceed.

But then we shall have an immediate consciousness of the purity, the majesty, and the mercy of God; all his character shall be revealed, all his glory rendered visible. The pure in heart shall then see God, and see in him all they wish; shall find enough in the infinite resources of his nature to expatiate upon to all eternity. Good men now say with Philip, 'Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us;' but there they will behold the divine shekinah without a veil between, and gaze upon his glory with inconceivable delight. Those mysteries which are combined in the person of Christ, will there be developed. God will be seen and known by us, even as we are known, not by the feeble light of reason, or of revelation imperfectly understood, but in the perfect light of eternity.

5. The works of providence and grace will then be completed.

The present is the period of mystery, every thing around us is merged in obscurity; but the purposes of the divine mind will then be accomplished, and the fruits of his sovereign mercy be brought to full maturity. The Holy Spirit having finished his work of renovation, will then put upon it the stamp of perpetuity. The whole inheritance of Christ will be secured, and nothing remain to be completed.

All the illustrious characters that appeared under the Old and New Testaments, the whole army of martyrs, and the pious of all ages, will be united in one general assembly, and church of the first-born. None of the poorer members of Christ will remain in obscurity, for this will be the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, and will gather together his elect from the four winds of heaven.

And if it be so delightful to meet with a few only of God's people on earth, what will it be to see the whole nations of the redeemed, congregating together from every kindred and every tribe, and forming one new society. What joy will it occasion, to see the completion of that eternal edifice which Christ began to build, when the topstone shall be brought forth

with shoutings, grace, grace unto it. He will indeed appear as the great God and our Saviour, who could raise from the ruins of the fall, such a stupendous fabric, composed of living stones.

6. It will add incomparably to the felicity of the blessed, that all is crowned with perpetuity. If a miser could insure his wealth, it would enhance its value tenfold; but it is his misery when he dies, that he can carry nothing away with him in his hand. While on the contrary, he who lays up treasure in heaven need not fear either moth, or rust, or thieves; all is eternally secure. There shall be 'no night' there, no danger to be apprehended, no darkness to be feared. The glory of God and the Lamb are the light of the celestial city, and the nations of them that are redeemed shall walk in the light thereof.

II. Observe the manner in which believers are affected with these prospects in the present life: they are "looking for that blessed hope."

1. They expect it as a matter of absolute certainty. It is no visionary object, but is founded on an immutable basis. It is the hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began. Titus i. 2. The salvation first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was afterwards confirmed to us by those who heard him: God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. Heb. ii. 3, 4. Whatever we may doubt of besides, all doubt is here excluded. Christ not only had the words of eternal life, but the title deeds of that vast inheritance, and has transmitted them to all his followers; and they that believe, now enter into his rest. He promises them nothing but eternal life: a thick and impenetrable veil is suffered to rest upon the morrow, but like a God he stretches forth our prospects into eternity.

Believers are looking for this blessed hope with humble expectation, and deep abasement. The exceeding and eternal weight of glory presses down every rising of pride and self-righteousness, and sinks them low in the dust before God. Recollecting the way in which they attain it, by the blood of the cross; and that their escape from eternal death is the effect of mere grace, they, in looking for this blessed hope, are in effect looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

3. To them it is also a joyful expectation, one that they are waiting for with intense desire. All men live in the expectation of death and eternity, and to most it is an object of fear and dread. To unbelievers especially, and apostates, there is 'a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.' What else means those agitations, when labouring under disease; or why so uneasy on a bed of sickness? But it is the prerogative of the christian, that he can contemplate death with composure, and look forward into eternity with holy joy and exultation. He is looking with that wishful ignorance with which a child looks to his father's hand, that contains some desirable good which it is in his power to bestow.

4. Eternal life is the habitual expectation of the christian, that for which he is "looking," throughout the whole course of his pilgrimage.

When borne down with afflictions, it is that to which his eye is directed, as the relief of all his sorrows, and which makes his troubles appear light and momentary. If the world frowns upon him, he feels a secret sunshine in his soul, and recollects with delight that all will soon be absorbed in eternity. This hope is so dear to him, that he would not forego it for ten thousand worlds. It was this that supported the virtue of Moses, in choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, for he had respect unto the recompense of reward. A readiness to suffer, and to die for Christ, is in immediate connection with this hope; and they that suffer with him, shall also reign with him.

VISION OF THE DRY BONES.

And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, Oh Lord God thou knowest.—Ezekiel xxxvii. 3.

The design of the prophet in this chapter, is to foretel the restoration of Israel from their low and degraded state, as mentioned in ver. 11. They are considered under the imagery of an army slain in battle, where the field, many years afterward, exhibits a great multitude of bones scattered upon the surface, dried and bleached by exposure to the air. And in viewing such a scene, the prophet beheld the ruined and hopeless condition of the people of Israel, after their captivity in Babylon. 'Behold, they say, our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts.' But it is intimated that it should not always be thus, for God would accomplish a kind of resurrection among them, and breathe upon the slain. This might refer to their restoration from Babylon, or to a period still future, when the Jewish church shall be gathered together, and brought to embrace the Saviour.

That the prophecy is yet to be accomplished at some future period, may appear from the following reasons.

(1) It extends to the *whole house of Israel*, and not to Judah only: ver. 16—23.

(2) They are to be an *exceeding great army*, ver. 10: but they that came from Babylon were not much more than fifty thousand.

(3) The *general drift* of the prophecy, especially in the latter part of the book, refers to the times of the Messiah, and some parts of this chapter seem to be applicable to no other: ver. 24. Hos. iii. 5.

(4) The restoration here mentioned is to *remain*, and continue for ever: ver. 26—28.

On these accounts it may be concluded, that the resurrection here foretold, refers to times still to come; and is the same as that mentioned by the apostle, when the restoration of the Jewish church shall become the life of the world. Rom. xi. 15.

I. Consider the prophetic description of the present and future state of the Jewish church and nation.

They are too much a forgotten people, though we are highly indebted to them for their father's sake—

1. The imagery in the text, of a valley full of dry bones, is very descriptive of their present *scattered and unconverted state*.

Nothing could more strikingly represent their unhappy condition than a multitude of dry bones, scattered about on a field of battle; a conquered and a ruined people, deprived of national existence, and dispersed over all the earth. Not only scattered, but dried up. The bones that now appear in the valley of vision, numerous and 'very dry,' were once clothed and animated with living bodies, possessed of living souls, once the temple and the residence of the God of Israel.

The ancestors of this ruined nation were God's peculiar people: they loved him, and he was in the midst of them. They were united to each other, 'bone to his bone,' by the strongest ties of national sympathy, by an intercommunity of privileges, by the oneness of their faith and worship, and by that holy affection which distinguishes the church of the living God. What they once were, and what was once their glory may be seen in their congratulations, and in their songs of praise. Psal. lxxvi. 1, 2.

But what are they now? Alas, strangers to God, and to the love of God, as much as they are strangers to Christ. They thought to be God's friends, while they were Christ's enemies; but 'if God were your Father,' said he, 'ye would love me.'

Losing this principle of love to God and the Redeemer, they have ceased to love one another: and have no bond of Union among them, excepting that of mere nationality. They are still preserved a distinct people, but without brotherly affection, or any mutuality of interest.

They are now a valley of dry bones, possessing none of that spirituality which so eminently distinguished their forefathers. Where now are their Davids, and Jonathans, and Hezekiahs, and Solomons; their prophets, and their priests!

2. Observe their *hopeless state*. The prophet is asked, whether these dry bones can live. Judging by sense, he must have answered, no.

No people appear to be in a state so hopeless and forlorn, and none have lived among christians to so ill a purpose. The veriest heathen, the grossest of idolaters, are better than they, and sooner receive the gospel. The unhappy slaves in the West India Islands embrace the truth, even in the land of their captivity, while the descendants of Abraham dwell in the midst of the most enlightened nation upon earth, and still retain their former enmity and unbelief.

Other sinners make light of the gospel, but these have a deep-rooted aversion to the very name of Jesus: only the mention of it makes them fierce with enmity, and they tremble with wrath and bitterness. Other men are wicked, but we have some hold upon their consciences. It is not so with the unbelieving Jews: Their very mind and conscience are defiled. Like the enraged Saul, they think that they ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus.

Sinners in common are like dry bones, but lo, these are "very dry;" and as to all human means, the conversion of this people seems to be a hopeless undertaking. Yet—

3. *Their restoration and conversion* are foretold. The answer of Ezekiel was like saying, they could live only by an exertion of

omnipotence, which therefore was known to God only. The prophet's saying, "Oh Lord God, thou knowest," does not intimate any doubt of his power; it merely goes to resolve the whole into it. Yes, they can live, for nothing is impossible with God: and more than this, they shall live, for he hath promised it. The children of Abraham shall 'stand up, an exceeding great army.' God will yet be their God, and Messiah the Son of David shall be their King. We cannot but notice here, *the order* in which things are placed. It seems as if many events might take place, preparatory to their conversion to Christ. Perhaps they may return first to their own land, according to ver. 13, 14; and this would agree with Zech. xii. 6, 7.

II. The subject is applicable to the conversion of sinners in general, without distinction to Jew or gentile.

The conversion of a whole people includes that of individuals, and the representations in this prophecy may therefore be applied to individual conversion.

1. The text may remind us, of *the condition of lost sinners*. What is their state, but like that of "dry bones?" Look into the world, and see the moral condition of mankind: ver. 2. Look amongst ourselves, and what do we see, but multitudes who have no desire after God, no love to him or to his ways; no real union with each other, no common bond of love. Such is the general state of mankind, while in unregeneracy and unbelief, a parcel of dry bones lying in the valley, without union and without life.

2. Observe *the hope afforded by the gospel*. If it be asked, can these dry bones live; the answer is, there is no hope but from God. It is not in the sinner to return of his own accord; no, nor to desire it, nor to desire that God should turn to him. Those that are saved, are saved by grace only, and the conversion of sinners is a resurrection, effected by the exceeding greatness of God's almighty power. Ephes. i. 19. ii. 1—6.

3. *The way that God takes*, in converting sinners to himself. There are generally some preparatory steps, in order to its completion, as in the restoration and salvation of the Jews. Nothing indeed is preparatory on *their* part, yet it may be so on God's part: ver. 7—10.

God does many things before he breathes the breath of life into them: the word is preached the sinner is convinced, awakened, concerned about the salvation of his soul. He is distressed in darkness forsakes his former companions, and evil courses reads and hears the word attentively yet still there is no breath, no spiritual life in him: ver. 8.

Here lies a great *mistake* among some christians, and some preachers; the one in considering every one to be converted who is merely convinced and awakened, and the other as considering this as a warrant to believing. Peter's address to the Jews, and Paul's to the Philipian jailor, went upon a very different principle. Acts ii. 37, 38. xvi. 30, 31.

The whole subject furnishes ground of encouragement, with respect

to the conversion of mankind, and the universal spread of the gospel. No case is so bad as to be despaired of: the dry bones may still live, though they be numerous and very dry.

END OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death.—Proverbs xiv. 32.

Human life is like a journey: we walk together as travellers to eternity. But death will be a time of parting; not only with all that we possess in this world, but a time of parting between the righteous and the wicked. Then they will take different roads, though they may have been more or less connected, and had intercourse together in the present life. This is a solemn thought: well might Balaam say as he did, ‘Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.’

I. Notice the opposite characters mentioned in the text: “the righteous and the wicked.”

All mankind are divided into these *two classes*, and these only. Various distinctions prevail in society, and it may be so; but this great distinction will at last swallow up every other. All will be lost in these two classes; them that serve God, and them that serve him not.

There are *different degrees* of wickedness, and also of righteousness; yet all men are reducible to these two classes. Many are grossly wicked: they glory in their shame: are openly profane, unjust, intemperate, serving divers lusts and pleasures. Their character is not doubtful, for their sins go before hand to judgment. Others are so eminently righteous, abounding in all the fruits of righteousness: men that fear God above many, and great grace is upon them. Such in general were the patriarchs, the prophets, and apostles. They walked with God, and had their conversation in heaven: such characters there have been in every age of the church.

There is also a *middle class*: persons who are neither grossly wicked nor eminently righteous who inhabit the confines of christianity, and bear a sort of amphibious character. They do not discover any great aversion to religion, are not open enemies to it; not bad enough to be classed at once with the wicked, nor good enough to be reckoned among the righteous.

All these *uncertainties* will be fully decided another day. Then we shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.

Some of whom we have but little hope, may have “hope in their death;” and others of whom we hoped well, may die without hope, and

at last be "driven away in their wickedness." He only [that doeth righteousness is righteous; and he only that believeth in Jesus shall be saved.

II. View their different ends.

1. The *wicked* are "driven away in their wickedness," and are hurried as it were out of the world. They die in their sins, and under the tokens of divine displeasure: many awful instances of this kind have occurred.

(1) Some have been hurried away in the very career of sin and folly. Thus with Pharaoh, in the heat of battle, and whilst fighting against God. Thus it was with Saul, when slain upon mount Gilboa. Thus with Nebuchadnezzar and his nobles, who died in the midst of a drunken feast. Thus with Judas, who went down 'quick into hell.' Thus with Ananias, who died with a lie upon his tongue: with Herod, who in the midst of his blasphemy, was smitten by an angel.

(2) Many have been alarmed at the prospect of death, and seemed distressed about their souls, will nevertheless be found to have died in their sins, and been driven away in their wickedness.

(3) Others who have heard the gospel, understood and professed it, but who have lived in impenitence and unbelief, will also be classed under this fearful description.

(4) Multitudes who have recovered from sickness have given awful proofs of the nature of that repentance which too frequently attends a sick bed, and how fallacious have been the hopes entertained in similar cases. The countenance and the tone are changed, but the heart is not changed. They send for ministers and pious friends, and anxiously enquire the way to heaven: but that being all they at length are driven away with the wicked.

(5) All who die in impenitence and unbelief, die in their sins, and go down to the grave with their guilt upon their own heads; and it will rise with them to judgment. Death comes to such in its original form, with a curse. Satan has the power of it, to deceive with false hopes, or torment them with his terrors.

(6) These are said to be 'driven away' in their wickedness: they are compelled to go against their will, and how much soever unprepared. As the enemy of our nature, death is dreadful to all men: but in the death of the wicked especially, there is a great cleaving to life and to the world. It is their all; they have no other portion, and none to expect hereafter. They are loth to leave their connections, their pursuits, their sinful pleasures: but they must go, must bid farewell! Must go, too, when they think they have just learned how to live; and like the rich fool in the gospel, their souls are required of them at the awful moment when their heads are full of worldly schemes and prospects.

Not only is there a reluctance in looking back, but also in looking forward, to meet their God: yet they must go. They keep lingering about the shores of mortality, but at length are "driven" off: sometimes as with a whirlwind, in a moment, they are hurried into the gulph of eternity. Psal. lviii. 9.

2. View the end of the opposite character: "the *righteous* hath hope in his death." The one is drawn forward by hope, while the other is driven by necessity. Death puts an end to the enjoyments of the one; but the other has a portion to come.

Whence have the righteous this hope? From Jesus, and the promises that are made to those who trust in him.

What is the object of their hope? A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: a glorious resurrection to eternal life, a crown of righteousness, and an inheritance that fadeth not away. Psal. xvii. 15. 2 Cor. v. 1. 1 Peter i. 4.

Let us learn from hence to estimate things according to their final results: judge of religion in this way, and also of the pleasures of sin.

If we live in sin, and without God in the world, we must expect to die so, and to die without hope.

If we die in sin, we shall continue in it for ever: he that is filthy must be filthy still. Now only is the accepted time, and this is the day of salvation.

SELF-EXISTENCE OF GOD.

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.—Exodus iii. 13, 14.

God was pleased to reveal his name to his ancient people, and to give them ordinances of religious worship; but as the children of Israel had long been in bondage to an idolatrous nation, where there were 'gods many, and lords many,' it was natural for Moses to request, on the present occasion, to be furnished with some distinctive appellation of the true and living God; for as yet his name JEHOVAH was not made known.

I. Consider the import of the glorious name declared to Moses: **I AM THAT I AM.**

The title "I am" is evidently derived from his eternal self-origin, and imports self-existence, independently of any previous cause; that the divine Being, so exists as to include all past as well as all future existence. This then is his name by way of eminence, and in contradistinction from every other. In the New Testament a very similar title is assumed, denoting permanent self-existence, without the possi-

bility of a change, or dependence on any other being or cause. 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord; who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.' Rev. i. 8.

It may appear singular to a christian audience, that Moses should ask, "What shall I say unto them," to make the children of Israel understand that the Lord had sent him: but there is a circumstance mentioned in the text which explains the reason. God had hitherto revealed himself only as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, as his memorial unto all generations; but as the present descendants of Jacob were deeply immersed in Egyptian idolatry, and had nearly forgotten "the God of their fathers;" had Moses opened his commission under the sanction of that endearing name, they would have understood but little of its import, and less still of the nature and perfections of the God of Israel. The Lord therefore was pleased to assume a title awfully grand and impressive.

II. The peculiar appropriateness of the name assumed by the supreme Being.

There must have been a Being capable of producing all things that exist, and who is the cause of all other beings, or they could not have existed.

That Being must be self-originated, underived, dependent on no other cause but that of absolute necessity, and hence becoming eternally and immutably the same.

He who existed from all eternity, and is the cause of all other beings, and on whom all things depend, must be possessed of unlimited power, infinite understanding, and every attribute essential to the immensity of such an existence, and the production of such stupendous events as are constantly occurring in the course of the divine administration.

There can be but one such intelligent Cause or Being, the unity of whose nature is demonstrated by the harmony and agreement of all his works and operations; by the universality of his unrivalled dominion, the immutable principle of his government, the adaptation of his laws to the whole universe of minds as well as of matter, and to every possible contingency attendant upon intelligent and accountable creatures.

This original, supreme, and incomprehensible Being revealed himself to Moses, under the discriminative and appropriate title of "I am that I am," denoting the inscrutable nature of his perfections, and his absolute sovereignty over all worlds—a name and a glory which cannot be given to another.

The following considerations will show the peculiar appropriateness of the title assumed on the present occasion—

1. It suggests no individual attribute in distinction from another, except that of immutable self-existence, and was adapted by its mysterious import to fill the mind with awe.

The gods of the Egyptians possessed only such properties as were familiar, and even contemptible: but here is a nature and a glory which no language can express.

2. The attribute assumed by the God of Israel was such as none of the heathen pretended to ascribe to their deities.

They had a succession of gods, an endless genealogy; yet none of them claimed an original, underived existence.

The annunciation of such a

Being, by the mouth of an extraordinary and inspired messenger, could not fail to excite reverence and awe.

3. Though no such Being existed amongst the acknowledged divinities of the heathen, yet the more enlightened part of them entertained an idea of his probable existence, if not of the certainty and necessity of such an existence; and the authenticated annunciation by Moses, would either perfect their convictions, or leave them without excuse. 'They knew God;' had an imperfect conception of some great invisible monarch, some universal governor; 'but they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.' They did not like to retain God in their knowledge, but excluded him from their speculations, and disdained his dominion. Rom. i. 21, 28.

4. The title assumed by the God of Israel, not only proclaims his necessary self-existence, in which he stands unrivalled and alone, but that he is also the source of being and of blessedness to all his creatures.

In the moral perfections of his nature he is proposed to our imitation; but to the attribute of self-origination, no finite being can aspire. This is the source from whence all other perfections are derived, constituting all that is essential to supreme felicity, and to the communication of good to the whole creation.

If we wish to have our minds elevated and enlarged, let us frequently meditate on the unutterable glories of the great "I am;" let us recollect our original nothingness, and annihilate ourselves before him.

Let us also remember our sins, and fall at his feet for mercy.

Right ideas of the character of God are essential to the existence of filial fear, and the work of true repentance. It is life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

NECESSITY OF THE ATONEMENT.

Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance, and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem—Luke xxiv. 46, 47.

It is remarkable how low the disciples were sunk, before the resurrection of Christ. That event was like a resurrection to them, and by it they were begotten again to a lively hope. 1 Pet. i. 3.

(1) Observe, the words of our Lord, addressed to his disciples, were intended to *set their hearts at rest*; by showing them that nothing had taken place but what was foretold in the Scriptures, and predetermined of God.

His plan was going on, whatever were the designs of men. This was like setting their feet on a rock when they were sinking: this truth they also remembered, and afterwards employed to an important purpose. Acts ii. 23. iv. 28.

(2) The words were also designed to *explain to them* so much as

they immediately needed, and no more. There were other things that it behoved Christ to do, as well as to suffer: it behoved him to ascend to heaven, to reign, to intercede, to come again. But this was not their present concern, and therefore his death and resurrection only are mentioned.

I. Notice the great and interesting facts which had lately transpired, and had filled the minds of the disciples with so much distress.

It was a fact then, that Christ had suffered—had risen again—and furnished them with a message of salvation.

1. *Christ had suffered*, had expired on the cross. This was an event on which all our salvation depended.

How did he suffer, and in what capacity? As a *martyr*? This is true, though not the whole truth. He did suffer indeed that he might bear witness to the truth, and for this cause came he into the world. John xviii. 37.

But this was not the principal cause of his sufferings and death: he suffered and died as a *substitute* in our stead. He was made sin for us, who himself knew no sin: he died for us, and bore our sins in his own body on the tree. 1 Cor. xv. 3. 2 Cor. v. 21. 1 Peter ii. 24.

As a martyr only, he suffered from the hands of wicked men; but as a substitute, he suffered from the hands of God. 'It pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put his soul to grief:' he bore the divine displeasure due to us.

He complained not of the former, but 'endured the cross, despising the shame:' but in the latter case he felt and expressed himself in the strongest language. Matt. xxvi. 38, 39.

Job complained that his grief was heavier than the sand; and the church in captivity exclaimed, What meaneth the heat of this great anger. But all this was as nothing, compared with what Christ suffered, for he was made a curse for us. Deut. xxix. 23, 24. Lam. iii. 1. Gal. iii. 13.

2. *He had risen again*. This was another fact which had taken place: he had obtained a victory over the grave, and was loosed from the bands of death.

God had raised him up, according to the working of his mighty power, and this in token of his approbation, and acceptance of his sacrifice.

Yes, he is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon. This was the source of a lively hope, and an example of our own resurrection.

3. He had furnished his apostles with a *message of salvation*. This is called "preaching repentance, and remission of sins, among all nations." This was another important fact, which should soon be realised.

(1) Observe, *repentance* was not itself followed by *remission*, as a necessary consequence: sin was too heinous to be thus atoned for.

Repentance is the duty of all mankind, as being a branch of the moral law and required by it, antecedently to all consideration of the coming of the gospel. But through the mediation of Christ, repentance and remission are now joined together.

Now, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins: but this connection is all of grace.

(2) The remission of sins is joined with repentance, for the honour

of God's righteousness: yet it is not for the sake of repentance, but through the name of Jesus, that remission of sins is granted, and there is none in any other way. 1 John i. 7, 9.

(3) This message of mercy is sent to *all nations*, 'beginning at Jerusalem.' This was now the worst city in all the world, for there they had crucified the Lord of life and glory. Yet there the mercy was to begin, though it was not to end there. Such was the fulness of Christ's sacrifice, that its blessings should be extended to all nations: all men are now commanded every where to repent, because now mercy may be extended to all.

II. Consider the necessity there was for these things taking place.

It was necessary, in particular, that Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead, and that on two accounts—

1. It was necessary *from the Scriptures of truth*: "thus it is written." Moses and the prophets had all foretold that he should suffer and rise again, ver. 44. The seed of the woman, Gen. iii. 16: Abraham's lamb for sacrifice, the prophecies of David in Psal. xxii. lxix., and those of Isaiah liii. all predicted this event. So also his resurrection had been foretold, Psal. xvi. He should see his seed, prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands.

2. It was also necessary *from the nature of things*. "It behoved him to suffer;" it was not possible that the cup should pass from him. Matt. xxiv. 39. Luke xxiv. 26. Heb. ii. 17. x. 4. Yet it may be asked, in what sense did it behove him to suffer? Certainly he was not originally obliged to it: no, it behoved us as sinners to suffer, and not him. We should have suffered justly, had we been consigned to punishment: but this cannot be said of our Surety. It is only in consideration of two things, that it behoved him to suffer—

(1) His own voluntary *engagements*. There was a necessity for his going through with the work which he had begun: he had sworn as it were to his own hurt, but repentance must be hid from his eyes.

(2) Our *salvation* made it necessary. If we be saved, the cup must not pass from him; otherwise God would have spared his own Son.

He must bear the curse, or it must fall upon us: he must drink the cup, or we cannot be exempt.

It was also fit that he should *rise again*: for if not risen, we are yet in our sins. His sacrifice would not have availed, had he not risen to carry it into effect: hence it is said that he died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification: and hence it is that he is able also to save to the uttermost. Rom. iv. 25. v. 10. Heb. vii. 25.

There was likewise a propriety in *repentance being preached in his name*. It was fit that pardon should then be proclaimed: the jubilee followed on the great day of atonement. Lev. xxv. 9. It was not for the sake of repentance, but for his name's sake: yet without repentance there is no remission.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) We learn from hence the *way of salvation*: 'repent and believe

the gospel.' This is the way for all men and for all nations to the end of time, and no other way will do.

(2) We see the *alsufficiency* of salvation for the chief of sinners. The gospel might first have been sent to other nations, and last of all to the Jews: but to display its fulness it was to "begin" at Jerusalem.

(3) The deplorable condition of those who perish in *unbelief*, and from under the sound of mercy. Matt. xxiii. 37.

VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION.

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.—James i. 12.

Primitive christians were like ships in a storm, continually exposed to trouble. The apostles were like commanders, keeping them together and cheering them with the hopes of reaching the harbour in safety at last. Such also are the hopes and comforts which we need in this world of trouble.

I. Enquire what it is to endure temptation.

"Temptation" is that which tries us, and brings us to the proof: it is like the field of battle to a soldier, which puts his courage to the test. We are tried by things pleasant, and by things painful: both are included, and both are mentioned in this connection, ver. 2, 13. Some things try our love, and others our patience.

But what is it to "endure" temptation, so to endure as to obtain the crown of life?

1. It is not merely our *being tempted*, but resisting temptation. All men are exposed to temptation, but all do not endure. The whole of the present life is a state of probation and trial: we are exposed to the influence of a thousand different objects, but all do not stand the trial. The greater part of mankind are carried down the stream, without any resistance.

2. It is not merely to resist, but to *resist successfully*, or so as to overcome. Many resist temptation from the fear of punishment, or the mere dictates of conscience: but there is no success in this kind of warfare. Pilate was tempted to condemn Christ, in order to please the Jews; and he at first resisted, but at last delivered him into their hands. Nothing but *love* will enable us to overcome: it must be by faith in the blood of the Lamb: hence the crown of life is promised to "them that love him." 1 John v. 5. Rev. xii. 11.

3. To endure temptation, we must not only resist successfully, but *perseveringly* to the end of life. Some have endured for a time, and have afterwards been overcome. But this means enduring to the end, for such only shall be saved. Matt. x. 22. It is pos-

sible to escape the corruptions of the world through the knowledge of Christ, and yet afterwards be entangled and overcome. But the christian, though baffled in some instances, will recover again, and overcome at last: and though faint, he will yet pursue the enemy.

In order to see more particularly wherein this enduring of temptation consists, let us notice a few of the different kinds of temptation, which a believer has to encounter in the present world.

1. Temptations may be distinguished by *the different periods of life*, through which we have to pass. Those who are young in years, are in danger from 'youthful lusts;' of those lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. You who are settled in the world may begin to think that your temptations are over: but no, they are only changed. You had need to beware of 'the cares of the world,' which choak the word and render it unfruitful. If farther advanced in life, you may imagine that you have done with the world; but the world may still be in your hearts. Take heed therefore and 'beware of covetousness' in old age.

A man who has lived long in the world, knows the worth of money: and his other passions being spent and exhausted, he is in danger of setting his heart on that. Blessed is the man that endureth all the way through, so as not be moved away from the hope of the gospel.

2. Temptations may also be distinguished by *the different stages of religious life*, through which we may pass.

Perhaps you are under concern about your souls, and are enquiring the way of salvation. The enemy will now be busy with you, either leading to presumption or despair, or persuading you to rest in something short of Christ. You now begin to hear the word, to weep and pray, to hate evil and love the truth. Now you will be in danger of thinking that all this may suffice; or if not, you may be tempted to despair, to think that God cannot or will not hear and save you.

Perhaps you may be farther advanced in the religious life; you have probably found the Saviour, and obtained rest for your soul. Perhaps you are become a member of a christian church, and stand approved; beware then of carnal security, relaxing into watchfulness, and in the performance of holy duties.

At various periods of life you may be beset with numerous temptations, like a storm that had suddenly risen upon you; or you may have met with peculiar afflictions and trials, under which you may be in danger of fainting, and think you cannot bear up under them.

But oh remember, 'blessed is the man that endureth temptation.'

3. Temptations may be distinguished by *the different situations and circumstances* in which we are placed: ver. 9, 10.

Some have to meet with poverty, and some are possessed of wealth, while others alternately experience both. Each of these have their peculiar temptations, though the last is especially trying.

'Thou hast lifted me up,' says the psalmist, 'and cast me down.'

Asaph's feet had well nigh slipped, when he considered the low estate of the godly in this world: yet Hezekiah's heart was lifted up, when he was blessed with worldly fulness. Some have been exposed to reproaches and persecutions: some have had to endure applause, and to pass through evil and good report. Blessed is he that endureth.

4. Temptations may farther be distinguished by *the different propensities of our nature*, to which they are addressed. The tempter knows how to avail himself of this circumstance: there are sins that easily beset us, and great danger arises from this quarter. Jehoshaphat, by his pliant temper, was led into a dishonourable affinity with Ahab; and Peter by his courage and boldness, was driven to presumption.

5. There are temptations *peculiar to the times in which we live*.

The god of this world can always find employment for his subjects, and is ever contriving how to ensnare the feet of the godly.

Formerly, the great temptation to Israel was idolatry. Since then, popery became the course of this world, and all the world wondered after the beast. Now the religion of the world is formality or sceptical indifference: formerly it was superstition, now it is infidelity and contempt of serious piety. Each of these periods have their snares, and are adapted to try them which dwell on the earth.

II. The encouragement we have to endure and to overcome.

‘When he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

1. *A crown* is promised to the conqueror. This alludes to the Grecian games, in which a laurel crown was placed on the head of the victor. The crown denoted honour and glory. That was vain and transient, this is real and substantial. It will consist in a sense of God’s approbation of us and our services. To this the plaudit will be given, ‘Well done good and faithful servant.’ This is the grace that shall be brought unto us, at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Matt. xxv. 21. 1 Peter. i. 13.

2. Not merely a crown, but *a crown of life*. Death includes all that is evil, and ‘life’ all that is good and desirable. The highest, the best good, and good that shall endure for ever.

3. It is a crown of life which *the Lord hath promised*. He hath promised it to Christ as a part of his reward: it was his prayer that his people might be with him. Christ himself also joins in the promise. Rev. ii. 3.

4. We must wait for it *till we are tried*. But though it tarry, it shall surely come; and come when it will, it must be welcome.

Let us think of this in every hour of temptation—if we fail in that here, we shall lose the crown.

LOVE TO THE NAME OF THE LORD.

Then they that feared the Lord, spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.—Malachi iii. 16.

When religion is in a low state at any particular period, it is considered as an excuse for the want of holy activity. Many seem to think there is but little hope of doing any thing to purpose; and that if we can but just keep alive in such a Laodicean state of the church, it is all that can be expected. How different the lesson taught us in this passage! In a time of general corruption, when the priests themselves had depraved the law were enemies to true religion and the common people like them there were a few of another spirit.

(1) Observe their *character*: they were such as “feared the Lord.”

While all around them were practical atheists, they felt the importance of true religion.

(2) What they *did*: they “spake often one to another.” Not content with public opportunities, they sought each other out, stirred one another up, and delighted in each other’s good.

(3) How their *minds* were employed: “they thought upon his name.”

Thinking it not opposed to speaking, but to forgetting.

The Lord’s name was dear to them: they were concerned for its glory, and grieved for its dishonour.

(4) What the Lord did *for them*: “he hearkened and heard.”

They met together privately, as the sorrowful disciples did for fear of the Jews: but there was one that hearkened heard and approved. What is more, it was “written before him” according to the custom of eastern kings, who kept records of all that was done for their honour. Esther vi. 1.

Enquire what is included in our thinking on the name of the Lord —and what advantages will arise from it.

4. Explain what is meant by thinking on the name of the Lord in a way that he approves.

This expression is descriptive of the nature of true religion.

What is *repentance* towards God, but thinking on his name with grief for having dishonoured it. What is *faith* in Christ, but thinking on his name with delight, as revealed in the gospel. What is *love* to God, but thinking on his name affectionately, and with the highest satisfaction.

More especially, it includes an earnest and habitual concern for God’s cause and interest in the world, and for the spread of the gospel.

The name of the Lord is more deeply interested in this, than in all other things besides, and therefore it requires more of our thoughts.

When David thought of his name, his heart was set on the prosperity of the Messiah's kingdom. Psal. lxxii. Here God is glorified in the highest the gospel is the overflowing of his blessedness.

More particularly—

1. If we think on the name of the Lord in a way that he approves, *all we do in religion will be directed to his glory.* We may be zealous in holy duties—praying, reading, hearing the word—with a view to our own name. This is not religion, but mere vanity.

In the conduct of Mary, Zachariah, and Elizabeth, we see how dead they were to their own honour, and how alive to the glory of God. Their souls did magnify the Lord, and rejoice in God their Saviour. John also was willing to decrease, that the Saviour might increase. This only is true religion.

2. If we think on the name of the Lord, *we shall reckon no sacrifice too great for it.* He who has but little affection for his holy name, will think much of what he gives much of what he does to promote its glory and much of what he may suffer on account of it. The opposite of all this is true religion. Acts xxi. 13.

3. It implies that *we seek even our own spiritual advantage in subordination to it.* Many are coming and going to the house of God, merely to get comfort and cannot find it. Primitive christians sought first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness cultivated a public spirit laid themselves out for usefulness and were filled with joy and peace in believing. They thought of nothing but Christ, and his name. This was the substance of their doctrine the life of their religion the source of all their enjoyments. Hence they had no distressing doubts and fears. If we take care of God's honour, he will take care of our peace.

II. Observe in what manner God remembers those who remember him, or think upon his name.

God is not unmindful of any of his creatures, nor does he need a book of remembrance; but he will think of those to do them good, who think of him.

1. The Lord generally employs those who *love his name* as instruments in *promoting its glory.* All the great things that have been done in the church, have been done by characters of this description. Those that honour me, I will honour: but woe to the idol shepherd. Zech. xi. 17.

2. In seeing his holy name glorified, they find *their own reward.* The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in their hand: what else is their hope or joy. 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

3. Their labours shall be *remembered for good* in this life, and even when they are gone to their grave. They are of one heart with God: their zeal is united with his zeal, and their labours shall not be in vain in the Lord. The seed sown shall spring up, and future generations shall bless their memory.

4. At *the last day* the Judge will bring forth the book that was written before him, and read it in the presence of an assembled world. Matt. xxv. 21—23. Heb. vi. 10.

(1) There is no true religion but where the name of the Lord is loved and adored.

(2) No hope of being useful in the cause of God without a portion of this spirit.

IMPORT AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE GOSPEL.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.—1 Timothy i. 15.

It is a most important truth, that Christ died for sinners, and that he died not for little sinners only, but for great ones, even the chief. This it was that supported the mind of Paul. His great sin in persecuting the church of God laid heavy on his heart: but he obtained mercy. “This is a faithful saying,” or he had never shown mercy to me. Ah, well might he say so! This great truth also contains all our hope.

There are three things in the text worthy of notice—Wherein does this faithful saying consist—why is it so called—and what reception does it demand.

I. Wherein does this true and faithful saying consist.

The saying itself is, “that Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief:” that he came to save them by his own atoning death, and not merely to instruct them, or help them to save themselves; but to redeem them unto God by his blood—yea, the very chief of sinners.

The difference between one sinner and another is nothing as to salvation: such hopes are vain, and such fears are groundless.

This is a faithful saying, because—

1. It is a fact sustained by *the clearest evidence*. When John sent to Jesus, enquiring whether he was the Christ, he immediately appealed to the miracles he had wrought. Matt. xi. 3—6. To him give all the prophets witness. The time of his coming was foretold by Daniel: the place where he should be born, by Micah: that he should be of the tribe of Judah, and of the family of David, was also clearly pointed out: and the treatment he should meet with is circumstantially narrated by the evangelical prophet. Isai. liii.

2. It is a fact which implies the *utterly lost and helpless condition of sinners*. He came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Their state was bad, and bad indeed; it was desperate. Had they not been irrecoverable by any other means, he would not have come to save them. If sinners need instruction only, the prophets might have

sufficed: but he came to destroy the works of the devil, and we were therefore under his power. He came to deliver us from the wrath to come, to which he stood exposed.

3. The great and leading truth in our text supposes *the pre-existence of the Saviour*, for though we may be said to "come into the world" when we are born, yet not as being voluntary, which Christ was. Hence his coming into the world is mentioned as an instance of wonderful condescension, Phil. ii. 7; and of wonderful grace, 2 Cor. viii. 3. He was in the form of God, before "he took on him" the form of a servant. John i. 1.

4. This important fact contains *the greatest expressions of love*. If he had come into the world to save his friends from oppression and cruelty, as Saul did the men of Jabesh-gilead, the kindness had been great: but to come to save his enemies, to save sinners, even the chief, is wonderful love indeed: and it may well be said, Herein is love! 1 John iv. 10. Rom. v. 12.

5. It is a truth of the *highest interest to us*. He is God's unspeakable gift, and a feast is now prepared unto all people. This is the great point to which the dispensations of God are all directed. It is a fact which in its causes and consequences will occupy eternity itself, and become the theme, the song of heaven for ever. Rev. v. 9—14.

II. Why is this leading truth called a saying, a faithful saying.

The term signifies a speech, a word, a proverb, by way of eminence; the same as in Matt. vii. 24. The doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ had grown so familiar as to become a proverb, a common saying among the people.

1. Observe, this saying is the *ground of all our preaching*. The world is full of sayings different from this. Some are openly opposed to it, as infidelity; some tend to undermine it, as all false doctrine does; setting up the creature and good works instead of Christ.

But let our determination be like that of Paul, to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified. 1 Cor. ii. 2. Gal. vi. 14.

2. It is *the only ground of hope* for lost sinners. Look to Jesus and live, and beware of looking elsewhere. There is no hope on the ground of being little sinners, or good sort of people; and no ground for fear because we are great sinners. If saved at all, we must be saved amongst the chief of sinners, and in no other way.

III. The treatment which this important truth demands: "it is worthy of all acceptance."

1. It is worthy of being *believed*; for it is a true and 'faithful saying.' If the saying of a faithful man be entitled to credit, much more the truth of Him who cannot lie. 1 John v. 9.

2. It is worthy of being *gratefully embraced*: for the saying is good as well as true. Those who receive the truth in love, only treat it as it deserves. Of all truth that ever met the ear of man,

this is the most interesting: yea, it deserves the most cordial reception at our hands. Nor is there any one who can be exempt from obligation, wherever this gospel comes. It is worthy of 'all acceptance, and of the acceptance of all.

Considering what this saying is, and man's condition as a sinner, it might be expected that this would be its general treatment. But the incarnate Word was in the world, and the world knew him not: he came unto his own, and his own received him not. None indeed received him, but such as were born of God. John i. 10—13. So it is now: some do not so much as give the gospel a hearing, but make light of it. Some violently oppose it, and prevent those who would embrace it. Some prevent it and so destroy its efficacy. None receive it but such as are born again, and they only believe to the saving of the soul.

USE OF PAST EXPERIENCE.

Call to remembrance the former days.—Hebrews x. 32.

Many of the Hebrews were going off from the gospel, and returning back again to judaism. The text is one of the motives urged by the apostle, in order to reclaim them. In its import it is similar to the appeal made to the churches of Galatia, and to the church at Ephesus. Gal. iv. 15. Rev. ii. 5. iii. 2. Thus the believing Hebrews are called to remember the commencement of their christian race, when being illuminated by the gospel, they endured so much persecution and reproach, and endured it with christian fortitude.

The text is no doubt intended to teach us the use of past experience in religion; but as this subject is liable to much abuse, we shall

I. Notice the way in which it would be injurious to "call to remembrance the former days," and so to pervert the meaning of the apostle.

The principal abuse is when past experience is resorted to for the purpose of obtaining *comfort and security in a carnal state of mind.*

A professor of religion, who has lived many years without any appearance of growing in grace, buried in the world, in the ardent pursuit of wealth, aspiring to keep pace with worldly men, or indulging in some other evil, and wishing at the same time to keep up his credit and his confidence, he 'calls to remembrance the former days,' and hopes that all is well. On some occasions, conscience is awakened, and fears run high. He wants to make out evidences of his conversion. Every thing of late years is against him, but he tries to recollect his former times, and first impressions; and if he can but make out his conversion, he thinks that he has only to add to it the doctrine of final per-

severance, and all will be well at last. What is worse, this is often called, 'living by faith,' in opposition to living by sense; and many passages of Scripture are quoted and perverted to this purpose.

It is not *comfort* however, that such a person really needs. An apostle would at least have said to him, 'I stand in doubt of you.' The right way in such a case is to begin again, as a sinner ready to perish. If the gospel, which is addressed to *sinners*, will afford you any comfort, you are welcome to it, but not else.

II. The way in which it is right and useful to "call to remembrance the former days," and to revert to past experience.

1. The recollection of past mercy, and the early exercises of grace, may awaken *convictions of sin*, and grief and sorrow of heart, for having departed from the Lord; and so be the means of reclaiming us from our wanderings, and of reviving the power of religion in the soul.

Thus God reminded Israel of the day of their espousals, and the churches in Asia of their first love and their first works. Jer. ii. 2. Rev. ii. 3.

Compare then the love, zeal, and tenderness of former times, with your present religious state, and see whence you are fallen, and repent.

2. This remembrance may be the means of *rekindling the same sentiments and feelings*, as were once enjoyed. None of those feelings were too ardent, none of those religious exercises were too spiritual, and there is the same reason for their continuance as for their first existence. Sin is not less hateful, nor is Christ less precious than he was then.

Recollect therefore the best times of your past life, in order to recover those views and impressions which were then found to be so desirable.

Experience remembered in this way, becomes an evidence of grace. Psal. xxvii. 8, 9. xxxii. 5, 6.

The remembrance of past answers to prayer, will also furnish us with new pleas, in our intercession with God. 2 Cor. i. 10. 2 Tim. i. 12.

3. The remembrance of past experience tends to *soften and humble* our spirit, and to lay us low in the dust of self-abasement. Lam. iii. 18, 19, 20.

You have formerly had some experience of your *frailty*: the pride of strength and of mental power were your shame, and you were made to feel that you were nothing but vanity.

You have also had some proofs of your *depravity*, and much dross appeared when exposed to the fire of temptation, or the furnace of affliction. What a multitude of hard thoughts of God were entertained; how much discontent, impatience, and unbelief. Psalm lxxiii. 21, 22.

Perhaps you were then made to know that sin was the cause of all your sorrows, and recollection tended to augment your grief. Associate then these views, and let it produce genuine humility.

David would never remember his weeping and passing over Jordan, accompanied with the reproaches of Shimei, without associating with them the cause of his deep affliction, and deriving instruction from it.

4. The recollection of past *trials and deliverances*, tends to cherish hope.

When we advert to these we cannot forget how our fears subsided, and how God dispersed the lowering cloud. Thus David re-

membered the land of Jordan and the hill of Mizar, with humble joy and holy confidence. Psal. xlii. 6. What God has done already, may well give us hope for time to come. Lam. iii. 20. 2 Cor. i. 10. 2 Tim. iv. 17, 18.

5. It will be well for us also to remember the *lives and experience of other good men*, as well as our own, for this also will do us good.

When Jacob was cast down, he called on the God of Abraham and Isaac. Gen. xxxii. 7—10. He also directed his children to do the same: ch. xlviii. 15, 16. We may remember what our fathers have told us

what wonders the Lord wrought by the apostles

what faith and fortitude he gave to the holy martyrs

what zeal to the noble reformers and Puritans of later times

the woods the caves, the jails which they inhabited,

the fires in which they were consumed.

All tends to revive and strengthen the faith, the hope, and the confidence of true believers.

6. There is *one day above all others*, which we must never forget, the day in which the sun concealed his face, and when Jesus expired on the cross.

If Jacob remembered Bethel, and David the land of Jordan; let christians remember Calvary.

In "calling to remembrance the former days," nothing will do us so much good as this. Let us take our station near the cross, and there may we abide.

If any should object and say, they have nothing to remember in their own experience but evil, nothing but their former sins; let them commune with their own heart, and behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

If there be little more than trouble and sorrow to recollect, let not the afflicted soul forget the invitations of mercy, and the hope which the gospel gives. Deut. iv. 29—31.

THE FINAL VICTORY.

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.—1 Corinthians xv. 56, 57.

If we would judge of the importance of religion, we must view it in connection with our own mortality; and if we would know its worth, we must estimate it by the support it is adapted to yield us in a dying hour. That religion only is worth having, which will administer hope and comfort in that awful time.

Hence the utterable importance of the gospel: it is that only which brings life and immortality to light. Heathens, when they died, died as without hope: they knew not whence they came, nor whither they were going. Thus it is with all unconverted men now: they take a leap in the dark: they go they know not where, and become they know not

what. But an apostle of the Saviour could utter the triumph in our text, and many a humble christian has done the same.

The passage before us gives a two-fold view of death. It shows us what it is in itself, or what it would have been without the mediation of Christ; and what it is in consequence of his mediation. And if we would survey the magnitude of the formidable enemy, we must view him not as conquered, but as existing in all his force. It is here compared to a deadly serpent with its sting.

I. Consider what death is in itself, or without the mediation of Christ.

1. *It has a sting, and that sting is sin.* It is naturally and in itself the enemy of men, and the last enemy that is to be destroyed by the mediation of Christ. It is that which extinguishes the lamp of life, and separates us from all our connections and enjoyments.

When a man has provided himself with every comfort and accommodation, erected perhaps a comfortable dwelling, retired from business in order to enjoy the fruit of all his labour, and says, Soul take thine ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years—then death comes knocking at his door, saying, This night thy soul is required of thee.

But whatever bitterness there may be in this, the sting of death “is sin,” by way of eminence. Had it not been for this, there would have been nothing to fear.

To the upright and unoffending there is nothing alarming in a court of judicature, or the coming of a judge; but oh what terror it spreads among the guilty, who are to be tried for life.

Nor would there be any thing alarming to us in death, if we had never sinned: but our being sinners, and obnoxious to this part of the curse, is full of terror and dismay.

2. *The strength of sin is the law.* There is a strength in sin, in itself considered: it is like an irresistible torrent that carries all before it. It bears away the sons of men with its violence, and hurries them down the gulph of perdition.

But by ‘the strength of sin’ is not here meant its power over the mind; but its condemning power, which it derives from the law; a power to arrest the guilty.

Hence when any one has offended against the laws of his country, sin pursues and overtakes him. With a strong arm it arrests him, brings him before his judge, openly condemns him, puts him in fetters of iron, and passes on him the sentence of death.

Its strength to bind the transgressor is such, that he has no power to help or save himself.

In particular, there are three things pertaining to the law of God, which give sin its authority to condemn—

(1) *Its equity*, for it is ‘holy, just, and good.’ Were it otherwise, sin would have no strength, and death no sting.

If the sinner could plead that he had not justice done him; but that God was stronger than he, and therefore he fell a victim, he might even brave the terrors of his judge.

But the law binds sin upon the conscience, and his own blood is upon him.

(2) *Its perpetuity.* If the law could be abrogated, sin would lose its power: but it binds it upon the soul for ever.

There is

no repeal, and no remedy. Sin will always be what it is, and all its effects must be eternal.

(3) The *immutability* of its author—God the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. He can never cease to hate sin, and love holiness; and therefore he can never cease to express his abhorrence of what is evil.

II. Consider what death is, in consequence of the mediation of Christ.

It is now a conquered enemy: but it is so, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and him only.

1. Observe the *decisiveness* of the victory. Death is now completely divested of its sting, and of its power to condemn. It is not like a drawn battle, where one only keeps the field, but where the enemy is trodden under foot and ruined. Such is the language of the

apostle: "Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?" Such also has been the triumph of many a feeble saint.

The truth of this will however be more fully realised at the resurrection. Oh to see the myriads of Christ's people rising from their graves, and covering the breadth of Immanuel's land, and singing this triumphant song: to see this mortal putting on immortality, and this corruptible putting on incorruption! Such will be the triumph and joy, at the last and final day.

2. The *medium* through which the victory is obtained. On our part it is wholly a gift, a free gift; but it is through the mediation of our Lord and Saviour. He it was that destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered those who all their life time were subject to bondage. All unbelievers die either full of terror or under the influence of a delusive hope.

3. The *gratitude* that is due for his great and wonderful deliverance. Had it been given us in any other way, it would have been great, but having been obtained by the death of Christ, who was made a curse for us, it is great beyond expression. "Thanks, thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory!"

What death would have been, but for the mediation of Christ, that it still is to all who reject his mediation: it is only those who believe in him that shall never see death. John viii. 51.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.—John xx. 20.

As the resurrection of Christ is the most important of all events recorded in the Scripture, so the attention paid to its evidences ought to be

the most careful and minute. Neither the gospel itself, nor the privileges of believers, can be contemplated apart from it. If we are begotten again to a lively hope, it is by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If this doctrine therefore be not true, the hope of man is lost, and the whole edifice of christianity sinks into ruins.

Among many other passages of Scripture which tend to establish the important fact, that which now claims attention is sufficient for the purpose. The simplicity of the style in which the event is narrated, renders it intrinsically credible; and the account of the manner in which the minds of the apostles were affected, is so easy and natural, that we cannot doubt the authenticity of the statement.

In attending to the historical import of the passage, let us notice some of those circumstances which tended to fill the minds of the disciples with joy, on witnessing the resurrection of their Lord.

1. Their personal attachment to him, would render it a most interesting event. If Martha and Mary experienced joy at the resurrection of Lazarus, how superior must have been the joy of the disciples, on being restored to the presence of their beloved Lord. Their attachment to him was undoubtedly supreme, and there was none on earth or in heaven that they desired besides him. Peter could say, in the name of all the rest, 'Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.' His sincerity, at the time of making the vow, cannot be questioned, though in reverting the sequel we deplore the frailty, and the consequent failure of his resolution. We are not to judge however of the attachment of the apostles at the time their Lord was arraigned at the bar, or nailed to the cross, when they all forsook him and fled; though even then they did not mix with the populace, or amalgamate with his enemies; but retired into corners, and wept in secret. There was nothing like insensibility manifested at that awful moment. Instead of this, we hear the disciples mourning and weeping, as they walk together to Emmaus, and saying, 'We trusted it had been he who should have redeemed Israel.' We also see others of them hastening to the sepulchre with anxious solicitude: and when they despair of finding the body of their Lord, Mary stays behind, to wait the issue of an event involved in so much mystery. In short they felt bereft of their all. Conceive then of their joy and gladness, when all at once, "they saw the Lord," not lying in the tomb, but risen from the dead.

We are never so sensible of joy, as when suddenly snatched from the verge of despair, and are delighted and surprised with some unexpected mercy. On this occasion especially we may judge of the anguish felt, and the calm serenity which succeeded, by the strong metaphor employed by our Lord himself, who compared the two extremes to the pains of childbirth and the subsequent deliverance. John xvi. 21, 22.

2. The manner in which our Lord conducted himself towards them, after his resurrection, would greatly enhance their joy. There were no upbraidings of their past conduct: all was buried in oblivion. His first concern was to comfort them: 'Go, tell my disciples, and Peter, that I go before them into Galilee.' And why is Peter signa-

lized? He had denied his Lord; his anguish was more intense than theirs, and he needed more immediately the healing balm. The first appearance of our blessed Saviour among his disciples, when they were met together on the evening after the resurrection, was also distinguished by unspeakable kindness and condescension. Instead of approaching with marks of offended majesty, he introduced himself with a salutation of 'peace.' He had bequeathed to them this blessing prior to his death: now it is repeated and confirmed. John xiv. 27. xx. 19.

What then must have been their joy, on beholding this mighty Conqueror come forth with a new kind of spoil, not as from Bozrah, with garments dyed in blood, but with the blessings of peace, to soothe and assuage his disconsolate disciples, and to build up their faith in his most holy word.

3. The joy was heightened by the satisfactory solution of that great question, whether Jesus was indeed the Christ. The controversy which agitated the minds of all men was now decided. While beholding the splendour of his miracles, many were ready to concede the point: but when he was crucified, a darkness overwhelmed the subject, similar to that which covered the land of Judea. No human being could at that moment decide, or produce sufficient evidence of his being the Messiah; it was necessary therefore for God himself to interpose, and to settle this momentous question. Accordingly he was 'declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead.' Such a decision was completely adapted to silence all cavillers, and hence it was that the Jewish rulers were so anxious to impugn and to corrupt the evidence. The testimony borne by each of the apostles personally, to the fact of the resurrection, was also unquestionable. It was so unanimous and consistent, that while this foundation remains unshaken, it will be matter of joy and triumph to all believers, in every successive period of time, and throughout the ages of eternity.

4. The dignity and honour conferred on Christ by the resurrection, greatly increased the interest felt by the disciples. How inexpressible their gladness, to see him not only live, but 'living by the power of God.' He died in apparent weakness, but was raised according to the working of his mighty power. When a favourable change takes place in the state and circumstances of one who is much beloved, we naturally take delight in beholding it; but never was there a case comparable with that which the disciples now contemplated. A little time before, the Saviour had not where to lay his head; was destitute, exposed to shame, and crucified. Now he is Lord and governor of all worlds; all power is given unto him, both in heaven and on earth; to him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess.

5. The joy of the disciples was increased, by that effulgence which shone upon them after that the Lord was risen from the dead. The divine Being has so attempered the human faculties, as for each to contribute a share of enjoyment and satisfaction; but the highest gratification arises from the communication of moral and intellectual light, which sheds a lustre on all our hopes and interests. But during the whole time of our Lord's abode upon earth, the disciples were involved in much darkness and doubt, as to the true interpretation of prophecy:

and it was not till after the resurrection that 'he opened their understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures.' Many of the sayings of our Lord appeared to them inexplicable, and full of mystery; even the great doctrine of the atonement was not understood till now, nor its correspondence with the ancient types. They now beheld the Saviour in a new character, that of a Priest and of a Sacrifice; they now contemplated his sufficiency to expiate human guilt, and take away the sin of the world. They now saw him in those various traits of character which the prophets had delineated, and understood how he could be at once, 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and the Lion of the tribe of Judah;' how he could die on the cross through weakness, and yet have in himself the power of an endless life; and all this for the purpose of bringing into happy union, guilty man with immaculate Divinity. Well therefore might the disciples say, 'Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and opened unto us the Scriptures.'

6. The resurrection of Christ was the confirmation of all the promises, and this therefore would gladden the hearts of the disciples.

They had forsaken all for him; had left their occupations in life, their dearest relations and friends, and wholly devoted themselves to their Lord and Saviour, depending upon the assurances he had given, and looking for no other reward but that which he had promised. At a recent interview he had given them an epitome of the whole gospel; had promised to send the Comforter, who should more than supply the want of his bodily presence; who should impart to them a plenitude of wisdom, power to perform greater works than even the Saviour himself had wrought; whose abiding influence should give success to their mission, and cause their peace and joy to abound.

In the resurrection of Christ they received the confirmation of all these hopes and promises; they now saw them ratified and sealed, and were assured that they should in this world receive a hundred-fold, and in the world to come life everlasting. No expectations are now too large for believers to indulge, since Jesus is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept; no joy too rapturous, now that he is proved to be the Amen, the faithful and true witness, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

CHRIST'S SPIRITUAL MANIFESTATION.

Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.—John xx. 20.

Christians in general, on reading this passage, are too apt to regard it as a historical relation, which bears but little reference to themselves. The apostles, it is admitted, had great reason for joy, on being indulged with the personal presence of the Saviour: but we have not seen him, and therefore cannot participate in their feelings. Let it be remembered

however, that if they had not viewed Christ with an eye of faith, the mere external vision would have afforded them but little satisfaction.

That there is such a thing as a spiritual discernment of the glory of Christ, or seeing him in a manner altogether distinct from bodily sight, must be admitted by every one who believes the Scriptures; and it is to this, and not to external vision, that the promise of salvation is made. 'Whosoever seeth the Son, and believeth on him, hath everlasting life.' The former, though distinguished from the latter, is of the same spiritual nature, and inseparable from it, and includes a peculiar discernment of Christ's moral excellence and glory. One of the disciples asked, 'How is it, Lord, that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world.' Christ explains it by replying, 'If a man love me, he will keep my commandments; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' As Christ's abode must be understood of a spiritual manifestation, so our seeing him is that spiritual perception of his glory which is the peculiar privilege of believers. Christ is as properly 'seen' by an eye of faith, as he is said to 'dwell' in our hearts, and to make his 'abode' there, while his throne is in the highest heavens.

Admitting that believers as really behold the Lord as the disciples did, after the resurrection, though in a different manner, we are led to consider by way of analogy, the consolation which this spiritual manifestation affords.

Three things in particular may account for this sacred joy—

1. The intrinsic beauty and glory which is seen in the person and character of the blessed Saviour. We are so constituted as to render it impossible for us to be insensible to the charms of moral beauty: and such a concentration of virtues, such a perfect representation of all conceivable rectitude, justice, truth, and holiness, as is given in the character of Christ, can never be contemplated with indifference.

The mind must be buried in the thickest darkness, impervious to the piercing rays of mental light and glory, before it can be insensible to such a blaze of excellence. Beheld it cannot be, without joining in the extatic exclamation, It is 'the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth;' nor without being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2. This spiritual perception is generally accompanied with a sense of interest in Christ, which gives additional occasion for joy and gladness.

Where he is seen to be the chiefest of ten thousand, and altogether lovely, it is very natural to exclaim, 'This is my beloved, and this is my friend, oh daughters of Jerusalem.' The appropriation is in some degree involuntary; nor does Christ manifest himself to any, without affording some special tokens of his love.

3. There is at the same time a discovery of the fulness of Christ, and of his almsufficiency to save. In him is seen a plenitude of wisdom, to guide and direct our way; of power to sustain, and arm us against sin; of grace to enrich us with every spiritual blessing, and finally to bestow the gift of eternal life.

There are some seasons especially, when these views of Christ be-

come more clear and satisfactory, and afford peculiar joy and gladness of heart.

1. In the commencement of the Christian profession, when labouring under convictions of sin, and an overwhelming sense of guilt and unworthiness. Then nothing can afford relief but a sight of the Saviour; and this is sufficient to calm the most boisterous sea, and silence the loudest thunders. This can purify the heart, and purge the conscience from dead works. When despairing of salvation in any other way, a sight of Jesus inspires the soul with joy and gladness, proportioned to the depth of disquietude previously felt. It is the sight of a friend in the moment of danger; of an almighty friend, when things are come to the last extremity, and there is but a step betwixt us and eternal death.

2. In seasons of spiritual distress, and great mental darkness, nothing but a sight of Christ can yield us satisfaction. Though it is consolatory to the believer to reflect, that he lives not by himself, but Christ lives in him, and that his is a hidden life: yet he does not at all times perceive the Saviour, or his interest in him; and when some secret departures from God have brought darkness on the mind, all his spiritual prospects are overcast. Mournful and sad, like the sorrowful disciples who had been so long without the presence of their Lord, and confounded by the triumph of their enemies, the christian finds one believing view of the Saviour sufficient to change the scene, and turn all his mourning into joy and gladness. One smile from Jesus has such an attractive influence, that the believer follows him cheerfully through the wilderness, regardless of the thorns and briars of the way. His night of mourning is past, the day is returned, and he rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

3. When labouring under a load of heavy trials and afflictions, what could prevent from sinking into despondency, but the presence of Christ, who himself is afflicted in all our afflictions; who partakes of all our grief, and knows how to sustain his people in the hour of temptation.

On one occasion Paul was severely tried, when he 'besought the Lord thrice:' but how adequate was the promise, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' And afterwards, how does this same apostle exult and triumph, while contemplating the whole aggregate of human ills, and keeping in view the alssufficiency of Christ. Rom. viii. 37—39. Phil. iv. 13.

Paul knew no other way of animating christians in their race, and of keeping them from weariness and fainting, but directing their views to the Saviour, and keeping their eyes steadily fixed on him. Heb. xii. 1—3.

4. A spiritual manifestation of Christ in a dying hour, is another occasion of exalted joy. What extatic delight must the soul experience, on finding itself absorbed in a view of the Saviour; to be then conscious of an union with him, and rising with rapid wings to the seat and throne of his glory. And though at times the sins of the believer are set in array against him, and he is deeply humbled under a sense of innumerable imperfections; yet at last he shall join the triumph of the apostle, and say, thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Previous to closing these remarks, we ought to be reminded of that superior joy which the manifestation of Christ will afford in the world to come.

(1) When the disciples 'saw the Lord' after his resurrection, they beheld him much in the same form as they had been accustomed to see him prior to his death; for though his body was rendered immortal, it was not yet glorified; and though he lived by 'the power of an endless life,' yet no transformation was effected. The form of his visage was most probably unchanged, and the print of the nails still identified his person. But when we shall see Christ, it will be in his glorified state, like that in which he appeared on mount Tabor, and to John in the island of Patmos.

(2) Though the disciples saw Christ, they had only a transient view of him. He abode only a few days after his resurrection, and limited his visits to short and distant periods. But the destiny of saints is to inhabit a world, of which he is the supreme Lord; theirs the certainty of being fixed in that temple of which he is the light and the glory.

(3) Though the disciples saw the Saviour in an immortal state, they had the prospect of returning again to the trials and afflictions of the present life; and though we now have a view of him by faith, it is only to alleviate the toils of our pilgrimage. But then we shall sit down with him on his throne, and dwell in his presence for ever more.

(4) The disciples saw the Lord, without any transformation having passed upon them; they were the same sinful and dying mortals as they had been before. But when we behold him in glory, 'we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' All obliquity of character, all darkness of mind, every thing opposed to a state of absolute perfection, will be removed. The body also will participate in the change, and be made to bear a strict and perfect resemblance to the glorified body of Christ. Phil. iii. 20, 21. 1 John iii. 2.

With these prospects, what reason have believers to rejoice! Retire then to your closets, there behold the Saviour, follow hard after him in prayer, contemplate his character, view his agonies in the garden and on the cross, trace him to the sepulchre, and to the chamber consecrated by his presence, when he said, 'Peace be unto you.' Yet a little while, and you shall see him as he is. It will then delight you to look back upon every affliction endured for his sake; every loss will prove your gain, every sorrow be productive of endless joy. How will it surprise you then to see your prayers and your tears turn to such account; and how will you bless that soil which produced such an abundant harvest.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.—1 John i. 9.

The forgiveness of sin, and the way in which it is to be obtained, is at all times a subject of deep importance; but it increases in interest, the nearer we approach to an eternal world: and to a dying sinner, nothing can be equally momentous.

There are two great errors on this subject, into which multitudes have fallen, and which it is the design of the sacred writer to prevent. One is, of those who explain away the nature or necessity of repentance, in order to forgiveness; and the other, of those who rely upon repentance, as the procuring cause of forgiveness. The apostle plainly teaches, that there is no forgiveness without repentance, or which is the same, without confession; and yet at the same time leads us to the grace of God, and to the blood of the cross, as the only ground of forgiveness, or that which induces God to bestow it.

I. Explain the nature of that confession which is necessary in order to forgiveness.

1. To “confess our sins,” if we consider only what is fit and proper to be done, is but a *small matter*; and connected as it is with a blessing of such infinite importance, the requirement is as merciful as it is just and reasonable.

For a creditor to say to one who owed him ten thousand talents, Only acknowledge the debt, and I forgive thee all: or for a sovereign to spare the life of a rebel, on condition of repentance—is surely all that could reasonably be desired. Yet such is God’s message to a guilty world, and such the way in which he proposes the forgiveness of all trespasses. Jer. iii. 13. 2 Cor. v. 19, 20.

2. Considering the proud and self-righteous spirit of man, it is a *great matter* for any one to be brought to confess his sins, and the grace of God only can effect it.

Confession implies *conviction* of sin, or it cannot be sincere or genuine; but the mind of a sinner is stout and insensible. His language is, ‘What have we done so much against thee?’

It also implies deep *contrition* and sorrow of heart for having offended against God: but the heart of a sinner is hard and obdurate, and can neither be wooed or awed by wrath or tenderness.

Confession implies *ingenuousness*, a free and unconstrained acknowledgment of blame: but man is full of excuses, full of extenuations, and willing to cover his sin like Adam.

It requires a total *renunciation* of the evil confessed, the plucking out of a right eye, and the cutting off a right hand: but to all this the sinner is utterly averse, and cannot be persuaded to renounce his idols.

Confession of sin is necessarily accompanied with *faith in Christ*, as the expiatory sacrifice: the penitent was to lay his hand on the bleeding victim, while he confessed and received forgiveness. Without shedding of blood there

is no remission; and without faith in the atonement, that blood is shed in vain.

Nothing but the grace of God however can bring a sinner to this spirit. He may own his sinfulness in words, and make habitual confession in public worship he may be frightened into it at the approach of death, or be compelled by the power of conscience, like Saul and Judas.

But to confess our sins to God, from a conviction of their evil nature, with contrition and undissembled grief, so as utterly to renounce and forsake them, and to make the blood of Jesus our only plea, our only refuge—is the effect of a renewed heart, and of that grace which is able to subdue all things unto itself.

3. Contrary as all this is to the proud and impenitent spirit of man, it is *indispensably necessary to salvation*. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins:” but not else, on no other account, in no other way.

Repentance and confession are necessary to salvation, notwithstanding the death of Christ, which never was intended to supersede either, but to furnish the most powerful motives in order to excite them.

Confession of sin is not necessary indeed as an atonement, but for the honour of God, and to teach us how to value his grace and mercy in Christ Jesus.

II. The grounds on which we are to expect forgiveness, when sin is confessed.

Not from any natural or necessary connection between confession and forgiveness, as if it added something to the sacrifice of Christ, or entitled us to expect mercy. The true ground on which forgiveness proceeds is,

1. The *shedding of the blood of Christ*, as it is expressed in ver. 7.

This is the only fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Zech. xiii. 1. Sin is too deep a stain to be removed by any other means; and while it remains upon the soul, it totally disqualifies for intercourse with God, and the society of all holy beings. Like the leper, the sinner must be excluded from the camp, till his moral pollution is removed by the blood of Christ.

2. The *faithfulness and justice of God*, are also the ground of our forgiveness and acceptance in his sight. The former of these relates to the promises, which his *faithfulness* will see fulfilled. Some of these promises are made to Christ, and some to us for his sake: and having promised that he will abundantly pardon, and not retain his anger for ever, he will be faithful to his word, if we confess our sins, and plead for mercy in the Redeemer's name.

Justice also admits and requires the forgiveness of the penitent. Not indeed as a matter of right that is due to us: it is not what we can claim in any sense whatever, for then forgiveness could not be ‘according to the riches of his grace.’ Ephes. i. 7.

But God having admitted a substitute, and accepted his mediation, it is fit and meet that his obedience and sufferings should be rewarded, especially as this substitute was no other than his only-begotten Son, who took on him the form of a servant, and humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

All the reward too that he desired was to see of the tra-

vail of his soul, and with this he would be satisfied. Eternal justice therefore, and eternal truth, would approve of such a recompense, and concur in the free and abundant forgiveness of sin through his mediation, and for his sake. If God is not unrighteous to forget what we have done for his holy name, much less will he forget the Saviour. Heb. vi. 10.

We see in this proceeding, as in every other part of the economy of redemption, the perfect harmony of the divine attributes, and their concurrence and agreement in the exercise of mercy to a sinful world. Also the foundation that is laid for a sinner's hope, and the plea afforded him in seeking the forgiveness of his sins. But let it never be forgotten, that if instead of confessing our sins, we continue in a state of impenitence and unbelief, God will be 'faithful and just' in the punishment of sin, and in saying of the unrighteous, 'Let him be unrighteous still.'

VICTORY OVER THE WORLD.

Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.—1 John v. 5.

The christian life is a warfare, and one of our greatest enemies is the world. But the text seems to imply, that even some who oppose the world, do not oppose it with success; and this is true, for many after all become its victims. There are some however that do overcome: and the apostle enquires who they are. This also is worthy of our enquiry as well as his, that we may go and do likewise. It is John's design to magnify his Lord and Saviour; and in order to this he shows that all success in religion arises from faith in him.

I. Contemplate the Christian life as a state of warfare with the world.

By "the world" here is meant, not persons but things, not men but principles. With regard to the former, christians are required, as much as lieth in them, to live peaceably with all men; but with the latter they are to maintain a continual warfare. It is their business to oppose its principles, its spirit, its customs and temptations, its smiles and its frowns. These unitedly form a stream or 'course,' against which he that would get to heaven must struggle, and break his way through and overcome.

1. Observe the world has a *law of its own*, and that law is public opinion. This is almost the only rule with worldly men in judging of the expediency of any action. What will they think or say of this or that, is nearly the first question. It is this that produces a

fondness for appearance, and causes men to be ashamed of Christ and of his people. But if you get to heaven you must not be governed by public opinion, but in many cases go against it. The will of God must be your law, and his fear must be in your heart.

2. The world also has a *religion of its own*, and go where you will you may find it. And what is it? It is altogether a system of self-righteousness, in one form or another. Various modes of worship have indeed prevailed; some pagan, some mahomedan, some popish, and some protestant; but these are only so many different modifications of the same principle. The spirit of all worldly men in matters of religion, is that of seeking to be justified by works; and which ever way they take, it is only a going about to establish their own righteousness, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God. All their doings are to appease conscience, and commend themselves to the divine favour.

The way to heaven lies in an opposite direction, and the whole of this system must be renounced. We must receive, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God. 1 Cor. ii. 12. Rom. ix. 31—33. x. 3, 4.

3. The world has a *latitude of its own*, and that is to indulge their propensities as far as is consistent with their interest, their safety, or their reputation, without regard to any higher motive.

What restrains the ambition of the conqueror? Nothing but want of power or the fear of being defeated in his enterprise.

What keeps men in general from all manner of excess, and secures a degree of temperance and moderation? The want of money or of means to fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

What urges the pharisee to the performance of religious duties, and makes the self-righteous so virtuous and exact? The fear of hell, the hope of reward, the desire of human applause.

In all this there is no fear of God, no love to righteousness, no true religion.

If we be christians we shall be influenced by very different motives, shall oppose and overcome the maxims and principles of the present world.

4. The world has a *spirit of its own*, and that is a spirit of supreme self-love.

Love yourselves, and those who love you, and then you are all the world expects you to be. Take good care of your own interest, get all you can, love your own party, your own country and nothing more will be required of you.

How opposite all this is to the genius of christianity, is evident to the most superficial observer; and before we can have any well-grounded hope of eternal life, we must be quite of another spirit. We must learn 'not to look every one on his own things, but on the things of others;' not to hate but to 'love our enemies;' to be disinterested, benevolent and kind. These base and sordid principles must be renounced, and a perpetual warfare maintained against them. John xv. 19.

5. The world has *its smiles and its frowns*, both of which are formidable adversaries. Sometimes it spreads its allurements, to draw us away with the workers of iniquity. At other times it threatens with persecution and reproach, to drive us from our steadfastness.

Both these must be encountered and overcome, if we would endure to the end, and be saved. Heb. xi. 24—26.

II. Enquire who they are that obtain the victory, and the means by which it is accomplished.

The apostle asks, "Who is he that overcometh the world?" Where is the conqueror to be found.

1. Then it is a fact, that great multitudes make *no resistance*, and never enter into this contest. They go down the stream, and are carried away with the torrent.

2. Others who make *some resistance* are so far from being successful, that they themselves are overcome, and brought into captivity. Their opposition is temporary and unavailing, and when temptation or persecution arise, by and by they are offended. Matt. xiii. 21. 2 Tim. iv. 10.

3. There are some who *really overcome* the world. And who are these? Look around and see. Are they heathens, in a wretched state of idolatry? Are they Jews who continue in their unbelief? Are they deists, who condemn revelation? Are they pharisaical christians, who make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter? No such thing: all these are under the supreme dominion of a worldly spirit. It is only among real christians that these conquerors are to be found, and it is faith alone that achieves the victory. By this it was that old-testament saints wrought righteousness, and quenched the violence of fire; and by this that new-testament saints sustained the opposition of the world with so much success, and triumphed over the pains of martyrdom.

How then is it that those only overcome who "believe that Jesus is the Son of God." The answer is, the cordial reception of this great truth draws with it the whole gospel, and includes all that is important to be believed.

In particular—(1) Faith unites us to Christ, makes us one with him; and being strengthened with all might through his Spirit in our inner man, we are enabled to overcome. (2) Faith endues us with principles directly opposite to those of the world, which not only keep up an interminable warfare, but give us at last the victory; for greater is he that is for us, than he that is in the world. (3) The peace and joy which true believing produces, make the world comparatively an easy conquest: it is crucified to us, and we are crucified to the world, by the cross of Christ. The gospel, by furnishing superior principles and superior pleasures, deadens the heart to every other object. Gal. vi. 14.

Enter not into the combat then, but with this weapon. It is Goliath's sword, 'there is none like it.' Ephes. vi. 11.

Let us judge of true religion by this rule, of our own, and of the religion of other persons. A worldly minded professor deceives his own soul, and his religion will be found to be vain. 1 John ii. 15.

REST OF THE GOSPEL DAY.

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.—Hebrews vi. 9.

In expostulating with the Hebrews on their proneness to return to Judaism, the apostle compares them to their fathers in the wilderness, who wanted to go back to Egypt, after they had entered on the way to Canaan. And having in the former chapter quoted a part of the ninety-fifth psalm, he applies it to the case of those whom he addresses; intimating that they also had a Canaan in prospect as well as their forefathers, and were in danger like them of losing it through unbelief. He also reasons from the time mentioned by David that the rest was not past, but was still to come. There was indeed a rest from the beginning of the world, when God rested from all his works; and another which was promised to Israel in the land of Canaan; yet after this, David still speaks of another rest. The conclusion is, “there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God,” and which we should beware of not losing through unbelief.

1. Let us here remark, that the rest mentioned in the text pertains to *the present life*. It is common indeed to understand it of the future state, and it is true that heaven will be a state of perfect peace and rest; but that of which the apostle speaks is a rest of which believers have already entered: ver. 3. It can therefore mean no other than the blessings and privileges of Christ’s kingdom, which are enjoyed by faith, but lost through unbelief. The peaceful reign of Christ is foretold as a glorious rest, like that which all Israel enjoyed in the days of Solomon. Isai. xi. 10.

2. The rest here mentioned is not promised so much to *individual believers*, though individuals partake of it, as to “the people of God,” or the church of Christ collectively. As Canaan was given to the people of Israel, so the gospel rest is promised to the church. It is a state common to the faithful at a particular period, and includes in it the blessings of the Messiah’s reign and kingdom, which was to be the great sabbatic year, or jubilee of the church.

3. Though this day of rest commenced at the ascension of Christ, yet the greater part of it *is still to come*, when the ancient prophecies shall receive a complete accomplishment. Isai. xi. 6, 12. We may therefore now say of Paul’s time, what he said of David’s time: ‘Even to day, after so long a time, there remaineth a rest for the people of God.’

I. State some of the reasons why the Messiah’s kingdom is called “a rest for the people of God.”

1. Because it is the period in which *our Lord himself*, having finished his work, *is entered into rest*, and it is his pleasure that his people should enjoy it with him: ver. 10. When David had rest round about, his subjects enjoyed the advantage of it, and reaped the fruit of

his victories. So Christ having led captivity captive, the Lord God now dwells among them. They are not exempt indeed from persecution and trouble, but he gives them his peace, and that is sufficient to make them happy.

The Lord's day is an emblem of his sacred rest, and preparatory to that which is still to come.

2. The *light which is diffused* by the coming of Christ, and the doctrine of the gospel, makes it a season of rest and peace. We now see more clearly the way of forgiveness and acceptance with God, and the harmony of justice and mercy in a sinner's salvation; and this gives rest to the soul. Jer. vi. 16. Matt. xi. 28—30. It was this that diffused so much joy among primitive believers, and created a jubilee in the christian church. Acts ii. 46, 47. viii. 5, 8.

The same peace is still enjoyed, wherever the doctrine of the cross is cordially embraced, and by it multitudes have triumphed over death.

3. It is a period which, during *the millenium* state of the church especially, will succeed to great affliction, great labours and persecutions, which the people of God have sustained in former times; and therefore with propriety called a rest.

It will be like the peace and safety which Israel enjoyed in Canaan, after the perils and dangers of the wilderness. Exod. xxxiii. 14.

Like that which they enjoyed in the reign of Solomon, after the wars of David, and in the times of the Judges. 1 Kings v. 4. Then the ark had rest, and then it was that God said, 'This is my rest forever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it.' Psal. cxxxii. 14.

Thus also it shall be with Christ, in the latter part of this jubilee. The temple shall be built, and his rest shall be glorious.

The church has hitherto been in the wilderness, Rev. xii. 14: or meeting with opposition, as in the days of David: but then all will be peace and harmony. Isai. xi. 9. xxxiii. 20.

II. Attempt an improvement of the subject.

1. Whatever blessedness is in reserve for the people of God, *it will be confined to believers*, and they only will enjoy it.

As there were those among the Israelites who entered not into Canaan through unbelief, and some that were never attached to David or to Solomon; so it was in Paul's time, so it is in the present time, and will be in the best of times. Even when the water of life is flowing in all directions to fertilize the world, there are certain parts given up to salt and barrenness. Ezek. xlvii. 6—11.

Let unbelievers know that they have no part in the Son of David, and let us all fear lest any should seem to come short of it. Heb. iv. 1.

2. Consider the *desirableness* of casting in our lot with that people who are blessed with such hopes and prospects.

Such was the advice of Moses to Hobab, when the tribes were going up to Canaan. Num. x. 29. Such likewise was David's desire: and shall it not be ours also? Psal. cvi. 3, 4.

3. If the rest in this world be so desirable, what will it be in *the world to come*, where our Lord has already entered, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God. 2 Thess. i. 6, 7. Rev. vii. 15—17. xiv. 13.

REDEMPTION FROM THE CURSE.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.—Galatians iii. 13.

It is a most unhappy proof of human depravity, and of our proneness to depart from God, both as churches and individuals, that even in the times of the apostles, many of the early converts began to decline in their attachment to the doctrines and precepts of the gospel. The Hebrews, the Corinthians, and the Galatians, gave signs of this apostasy.

The defection of the Galatians was chiefly owing to judaising teachers who taught that except they were circumcised, they could not be saved. This was putting the works of the law in the place of Christ, and so perverting the gospel.

To guard the Galatians against this error, the apostle shows that Abraham was justified by faith, and not by the works of the law: ver. 6—8. Also that none are the true sons of Abraham but those who believe in Christ, and that those who are attached to the works of law as the ground of acceptance with God, would find themselves under the curse: ver. 9, 10.

He then shows that there are two ways of life, the one for the innocent, and the other for the guilty: ver. 11, 12. And as we are all under the curse, there is no deliverance but by the blood of Christ.

I. Consider our exposedness to the curse of the law.

The fact itself is undeniable, for had we not been under the curse of the law, we should not need to have been redeemed from it.

More particularly—

1. Our obnoxiousness to the curse of the law supposes that we were previously under an *immutable obligation to obey its precepts*.

Such indeed is the fact, for we can never be freed from obligation to love either God or man, by any adventitious circumstances that may arise in the course of our existence.

Sin does not free us from it, any more than rebellion frees from an obligation to allegiance.

Grace of course does not, for it is its office to write the law of God on our hearts, and to put his fear within us.

2. Though under obligation to obedience, we have not kept the law, but *broken it in all its parts*.

Every one may not have committed every species of evil, so as directly to violate all the divine commands, but every one has departed from God in his heart: and having violated the *principle* of obligation, he is guilty of the whole law.

One sin admitted or allowed, shows that we abstain from sin not for the Lord's sake, but from some inferior motive, which is 'coming short of the glory of God:' and hence it is that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. Rom. iii. 10—23. James ii. 10, 11.

3. Having broken the divine law, and come short of the glory of God, even where obedience has been partially rendered, *we are inevitably under the curse*.

Every law has a penalty annexed, or it would

have no force; and a breach of the divine law has attached to it the penalty of death. It has both a blessing and a curse belonging to it, the one for the obedient, and the other for the guilty: and as we are of the latter description, we are under the curse.

Let us therefore examine a little into the import of those awful words—"the curse."

(1) It is a punishment which either is or is supposed to be inflicted by a power *more than human*. The profane cursing of wicked men is expressive of nothing but their impiety, and their malignant wishes towards others: but a real curse is either immediately from God, or from some one supposed to act under his authority. When Noah denounced a curse on the descendants of Ham, he was influenced by the Spirit of prophecy; and when Balak sent for Balaam to curse Israel, he was supposed to have had communication with the deity, or with some invisible power.

The curse of a poor deluded brahmin, or of a popish priest, like the curse that is causeless, shall never come: but to be under the curse of God is tremendous, and there is no escape.

(2) The curse of God's righteous law especially, binds a sinner over to *eternal punishment*. A violation of the law of Moses was attended with awful threatenings, as may be seen in Deut. xxviii. 15—19: and though these consisted chiefly of temporal evils, from which a sinner under the gospel may escape: yet is he under a spiritual curse, which is far more dreadful. This is to be cast out of God's favour and presence for ever, and to be abandoned to utter despair, with the sentence of 'Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.'

The present life is only a respite: the wrath is still to come.

II. Our redemption from the curse, by the Lord Jesus Christ. "He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

1. This is not a measure for which the law provided, nor is it according to the ordinary course of *distributive justice*, but an extraordinary expedient devised by the great Lawgiver of the world. The law did not provide any commutation of persons, but required that the soul that sinned should die: and we must all have died the death, if the law had taken its course. The provision for our redemption is therefore all of grace. John iii. 16.

2. Our deliverance from the curse is effected in a way that secures the *honour of the divine law*, as well as the salvation of the sinner.

Redemption is of two kinds, by price, and by power; and each is suited to our state. Where the dominion over us is *usurped*, no peace is to be made with the enemy, nor price offered for deliverance, but power must be opposed to power.

But where the power to detain or hold in bondage is *just*, deliverance must be effected by price, or appeasement made.

A friend is to be recovered out of the hands of an enemy, as Abraham recovered Lot, by his shield and by his bow: but a prisoner lawfully detained is to be delivered only by an honourable compensation, as Paul delivered Onesimus, or as Judah delivered

Benjamin. Gen. xiv. 14—16. xliv. 32, 33. Philem. 18. Our obligation to God's law is just, and our obnoxiousness to its curse is equally so: no violence therefore can be offered to the divine government; but satisfaction must be made to offended justice, by him who undertakes to effect our deliverance. Hence originated the sacrifices under the law, which continually conveyed the idea of redemption and forgiveness through the blood of atonement.

3. The term here used to express *our Lord's sufferings* is exceedingly strong: he was made "a curse for us," an outcast from heaven and earth.

The only immaculate individual that ever lived in the world since the fall of man, is treated as if he had been the only sinner. His soul was made an offering for sin, and in such a way as to show that sin was condemned in the flesh, or in our nature, and that the Lord had laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isai. liii. 5, 10. Rom. viii. 3. 2 Cor. v. 21.

Job complained that his stroke was heavier than his groaning; and Jeremiah, that he was the man who had seen affliction. But what were all their sufferings, compared with Christ's agony in the garden, and on the cross!

Let not those who behold the ruins of Jerusalem say any longer, 'What meaneth the heat of this great anger?' But look to Calvary, and see the Son of God expiring under the curse for us.

4. The effect of these sufferings is our redemption, and *deliverance from the curse of the law*.

When justice is satisfied, God has manifested his true character; and now he can be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. In saving sinners through his Son, God appears as much the friend of righteousness and the enemy of sin, as if the whole world had been condemned to perdition. Rom. iii. 24—26.

The redemption therefore is now full and plenteous. Psal. cxxx. 7, 8.

See the happiness and security of them that believe. The curse no longer stands against them, but all the blessings are theirs; and with Christ the Lord will freely give them all things. Rom. viii. 32.

Salvation now is freely offered, and Christ is ready to receive all that come to God by him. Blessed are they that put their trust in him.

DREADFUL EFFECTS OF CARNALITY.

To be carnally minded is death.—Romans viii. 6.

While the apostle exhibits in this chapter a brief view of the leading doctrines of the gospel, and the privileges of the godly, he is careful at the same time to show their holy nature, and practical effect.

If there be no condemnation, it is to those who 'walk not after the flesh.'

If all things work together for good, it is to them that 'love God.'

If the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in our justification, our sanctification is no less implied: and all carnality

is inconsistent with the spirit and design of the gospel, yea, it is death itself.

That carnality has this tendency, may be seen in its effects. It destroys all activity for God, and so produces spiritual death. It fills the world with misery, and destroys all our hopes and happiness. It exposes us to the wrath to come, and so to death eternal.

Where carnality wholly prevails, it produces these effects totally : where it partially prevails, they exist in a partial degree.

I. Carnality, in proportion as it operates, produces stupidity, or inactivity for God.

1. The very *essence* of that spiritual death which pervades the heart of the unregenerate, consists in the prevalence of this carnality. To what else can we attribute insensibility under judgments amidst so many mercies unconcern about eternal things unwillingness to come to Christ living without God in the world.

2. Where carnality *partially* prevails it produces similar effects, only in a less degree. Its tendency is to render us inactive in holy duties, by weakening and destroying the principles of action : nothing can be done without it.

(1) One of these principles is holy *love* : but carnality damps the sacred fire, cools and weakens our resolutions.

(2) Another is *hope* : the hope of success in the Lord's service, and of heaven hereafter, is essential to holy activity. But carnality beclouds our prospects, and hides the objects of hope from our view.

(3) *Faith* is also a powerful spring of action : nothing makes us more alive to God than a realising view of invisible objects. Heb. xi.

But carnality weakens our hands, and destroys the energy of faith.

(4) Conscious *integrity*, or walking before God, enlivens the christian in his course. Righteousness is the girdle of his reins, it strengthens him for action. But carnality enervates the mind, produces pusillanimity, inaction and sloth.

(5) Spiritual *joy* inspires the soul with courage, with holy ardour and delight in the ways of God. But carnality is death : it weakens all the springs of action, and paralyzes the whole soul.

II. Carnality, in proportion as it operates, produces misery.

1. We need only consider the state of those who are *wholly* under the dominion of a carnal mind, and we shall see what are its effects.

There we shall see men ever seeking after happiness, but never able to obtain it. Men at war with themselves ; conscience and inclination at perpetual variance ; continual fear and suspense about futurity. Every affliction gives alarm : they are afraid to know

themselves, or their true state, or to think closely about the concerns of their souls. They are loaded with guilt, and are self-condemned.

Oh, to be carnally minded is death worse than death.

2. Where this principle only *partially* prevails, it operates in the

same way, and produces similar effects. Guilt and darkness, misery and death, are its natural consequences. It causes distance from God, unfits us for communion with him, and casts us out of his sight; and this is the essence of all other misery.

What peace could Jonah have, when he had disobeyed the commandment of the Lord. What happiness could David find, after he had killed Uriah with the sword. Whither can we go for comfort, apostate from our God!

III. Carnality tends to ruin in the world to come, and to death eternal.

Left to pursue its course, this would be its final issue. Rom. vi. 23. James i. 15. Eternal death is the just desert of sin, its proper wages, its natural effect, and penal reward. It is enmity with God: it says to him, Depart from us: and he will say, Depart ye cursed.

Eternal death is the privation of all good, the endurance of all evil.

Carnality leads to this: it rejects the only remedy, the only refuge, and plunges the soul into the gulf of perdition.

It has the same tendency wherever it exists, and in whatever degree.

If the issue be not the same, it is because that tendency is counteracted. Like poison in the blood, its fatal effects may be prevented; but if it take its course, it will end in death.

How dangerous to seek relief from misery in carnal pleasures. They are bought at the hazard of the soul: the end of these things is death.

BLESSEDNESS OF SPIRITUALITY.

But to be spiritually minded is life and peace.—Romans viii. 6.

Experience teaches us, that our greatest happiness consists in drawing near to God; that the love of God is its own reward; yet how prone are we to live at a distance from him.

There are some, however, in whom this spirituality wholly prevails: as among the blessed above, where all is life and peace. In this world it prevails only in part, even in the best of men. We have much carnality within us: all our powers, principles, and actions are infected by it. Yet if we have any true religion, we are in some degree spiritually minded. We mind the things of the Spirit, and walk after the Spirit.

This is essential to denominate us christians.

Consider wherein this spirituality consists—and the blessedness connected with it.

1. Explain what it is to be "spiritually minded."

This subject, like some others in religion, is better felt than described : experience here is the best teacher.

1. To be spiritually minded is to have a *discernment of the holy beauty and excellence of heavenly objects*. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. 1 Cor. ii. 14. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

While in a carnal state, the mind is blinded by pride, by prejudice, by the vanities of the world. It can see no beauty in spiritual objects: the holy character of God possesses no interest. There is no form or comeliness in the Saviour, that we should desire him nothing desirable in the blessings of salvation nothing lovely in the holy law or glorious gospel in the worship, or in the people of God no congeniality between the state of the mind, and the moral excellence of these objects.

But a spiritual mind can discern and feel their beauty and their worth: and in proportion to our spirituality, such will be our relish.

Nothing contributes more to our understanding and enjoying the Scriptures, than this state of mind. Then it is that we can exclaim with David, as in Psalm cxix. 103. cxxxix. 17.

2. It is such a state of mind as to *live as it were on spiritual enjoyments*. These are its food, and its treasure.

The desires of a carnal mind are nourished by carnal and sensual objects: but a spiritual mind is taken up with heavenly delights. The truths of the gospel are the food on which it lives, and the mind is hereby weaned from earthly objects.

The affections are now set on things above. Self-denial becomes more easy, and the ills of life are borne with greater patience and fortitude.

3. Spirituality is a state of mind which *delights in spiritual exercises* reading, hearing, meditation, and prayer.

The more spiritually minded we are, the more we shall delight in holy duties, especially in those which are most spiritual; in close dealing with God and our own souls.

4. A spiritual mind will be apt to *turn every thing to spiritual purposes*.

It is the property of a carnal mind to convert every thing into carnal purposes; it finds food in every thing to gratify a sensual taste.

A worldly minded man does the same; he possesses the unhappy ingenuity of rendering every thing subservient to his worldly interest, and never loses sight of that.

A spiritual mind will be similarly disposed towards spiritual things: it derives instruction from every event, finds a sweetness in a thousand objects overlooked by others, like the bee that sips the honey from every flower.

It turns all the mercies of God into matter of praise, all his judgments into matter of humiliation, and even the depravity of mankind into pity, lamentation, and self-reflection. It takes food out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong.

II. The advantages arising from this state of mind.

It is "life and peace;" in its own nature—in its immediate effects—producing the most heavenly feelings and enjoyments.

1. Spiritual mindedness is accompanied with much *peace with God*.

It gives a holy and heartfelt satisfaction, a disposition to rejoice in God, in all his perfections, and in his universal dominion.

2. It is accompanied with much *peace of conscience*. It reconciles us to ourselves, and diffuses a sweet and holy calm. Oh that peace which passeth all understanding: how does it keep the heart and mind through Christ Jesus.

3. It diffuses life and peace under the most *trying circumstances*.

It is this which makes our heaviest burdens light, and gives a sweetness to every bitter cup. Patience, humility, and love will all perform their part.

4. It will give life and peace even in a *dying hour*. Then will its advantages more especially be felt. With what sacred peace and calmness did this state of mind enable Jacob to take his leave of the world, Gen. xlix. 18. Zachariah, Luke ii. 29. Paul, 2 Tim. iv. 6.

How important to cultivate this state of mind; by reading, by prayer, by watchfulness, by hearing the word, by delighting in the return of sacred opportunities.

THE REIGN OF CHRIST.

Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. And the eyes of them that see, shall not be dim; and the ears of them that hear, shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerer shall be ready to speak plainly; the vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful. —Isaiah xxxii. 1—5.

This prophecy has been thought to refer to good king Hezekiah, who was to succeed the wicked Ahaz; and it is possible the words may have such a reference. But it is very common with Isaiah to mix with his prophecies several intimations of the Messiah; and in most cases where other persons may be immediately alluded to, Christ is principally intended. The promise of the Messiah was the great pledge of their national security, and this was often introduced to cheer the minds of the godly in those evil times.

The text may therefore be understood as a prophecy of the Messiah's kingdom: indeed the second verse seems to be inapplicable to any other, and he alone can fully answer to the description given. Also ver. 3, 4, fully agree with other predictions concerning the kingdom of Christ, particularly in Isai. xxix. 18. xxxv. 5.

In this description of the Messiah's kingdom, there are three or four things by which it shall be distinguished—

I. Its equity: "A king shall reign in righteousness," ver. 1.

This is one of the blessings of his reign, and stands in opposition to most other kingdoms and governments upon earth.

1. There have been but few earthly kings who have reigned *in righteousness*, or princes that have ruled in judgment. Some of them

have been mere usurpers of public authority, and have taken the power into their own hands without right. Justice is nothing with them,

but power is every thing: and even those who have not been guilty of usurpation, have shown but little regard to justice and mercy in their administrations.

But Christ has a *right* to reign: he is placed on the throne by the highest of all authority. Psal. ii. 6. cx. 1.

It is also due to him, on the ground of his humiliation and suffering. Phil. ii. 9.

The reasons given for anointing and bringing back David to the throne, apply with much greater force to Christ. 2 Sam. v. 2, xix. 9—12.

God has crowned him, angels have crowned him, and let not men be the last to crown him too: 'he is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh.'

2. The best of earthly kings are often obliged, in the exercise of mercy, to *dispense* with the claims of righteousness. They cannot show

mercy and truth at once, or in the same instance. But Christ

causes grace to reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life. Under his government, mercy and truth meet together; and all he does is in a way of righteousness. Psal. lxxxv. 10, 11. Isai. xi. 5. Rom. v. 21.

3. The righteousness of other kings and rulers consists only in *rewarding the good, and punishing the evil*; and this in general is the utmost that human institutions are able to accomplish. But Christ does more than this: he subdues the heart, and restores an apostate world to the love of truth and holiness.

His kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness, of peace and of joy in the Holy Ghost; and whenever it shall universally prevail, the earth will be full of righteousness and peace. Psal. lxvii. 4, lxxxv. 11. Isai. xxxii. 16—18.

Those also who act under his authority, as 'princes' under a king, shall proceed upon the same principle. All his servants that are round about him shall "rule in judgment," for thus his kingdom is administered.

II. The blessedness of living under it. "A man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest:" ver. 2.

Solomon remarked, that 'when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice;' and thus when good Josiah came to the throne, the godly rejoiced in it. Lam. iv. 20. Similar to this is the import of ver. 2. in our text.

The evils to which we are exposed in the present life are here compared to "winds and tempests," consuming drought and burning suns; all of which in those climates are much more intense than in ours.

In opposition to these evils, Christ is "a hiding place, a covert, rivers of water, and as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The scenery of the language is an extensive sandy desert, which presents a huge projecting rock, with streams of water flowing at its base, affording safety and refreshment to the weary traveller.

The ills to which we are liable in the present world, and from which Christ becomes a shelter and a refuge, are the following—

1. The *wrath of God*. To this we are exposed as sinners, as to a stormy wind and tempest. Here he shields us by bearing that wrath himself; and to him the guilty must flee as to their own refuge. Prov. xviii. 10. Heb. vi. 18.

2. We are also exposed to the *common calamities of life*. Does war threaten our borders; They that dwell in him shall dwell on high. Isai. xxxiii. 16. Do afflictions overtake us, or pestilences and plagues await us? He is our hiding place and our refuge. Psal. xli. 1. xci. 1, 2.

3. We are exposed to *the terrors of death*: this is the last and the greatest enemy of all. But Christ is our refuge from its power: he gives us the victory, and gives us safety there.

The promises of his word and the consolations of his gospel are as “rivers of water” in this dry land: while his power, faithfulness and love, preserve us from temptation, as the shadow of a great rock from the sultry sun. ‘Thou hast kept the word of my patience, and I will keep thee in the hour of temptation.’

III. The holy and spiritual wisdom with which Christ’s kingdom shall be distinguished: ver. 3, 4.

Not only shall sinners be converted, but saints shall grow in grace and spiritual gifts. Not only shall the blind be made to see, and the deaf to hear; but their discernment shall be quick, and their attention ardently excited: ver. 3.

The “eyes” of those that saw, under the Old Testament, were generally very “dim;” and even those of Christ’s disciples were not much otherwise. But when the Spirit was poured out upon them on the day of pentecost, they were all eye, all ear, and all heart.

Even those who had been “rash,” learned the heavenly wisdom, like Saul of Tarsus. And ignorant and unlearned men began to “speak plainly,” and in a manner that all their adversaries could neither gainsay nor resist.

Such in a degree are still the effects of the gospel, where it is believed and felt: it is all that which our text predicts.

IV. Its tendency to bring the characters of men to the test: ver. 5.

1. Where but *little religion* prevails, sinners may pass for saints, and “the vile person be accounted liberal,” especially if they be great and mighty in the world. Hence such characters are often complimented, and a great deal is made of a few ostentatious actions, as if they were prodigies of virtue. But in proportion as the kingdom of our Lord prevails, and the light of the gospel is diffused, character will be better estimated, and men will be treated more according to what they really are. The Jews flattered Felix, and adored him as a divinity: but when an apostle addressed him, it was in a very different language. Acts xxiv. 2, 25.

2. Where but little religion prevails, mere nominal professors may be accounted real christians: but as Christ's kingdom advances, all their hypocrisy will be detected and exposed. The Jewish rulers, the scribes, the pharisees, and priests were reckoned good sort of people, in that day of ignorance and corruption, and the whole nation was deceived by their pretensions. But when Christ came, what did he say? 'Woe unto you scribes: woe unto you pharisees, hypocrites!' The gospel strips men of their false disguises, and shows them as they are: nothing but true religion can stand before it. It was foretold on the coming of Christ, that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed; and it was so. Luke ii. 34, 35.

Such is the nature of Christ's kingdom: it separates between the precious and the vile. Its tendency is to make men that in reality which they only appear to be—truly "liberal," truly "bountiful," and truly good. It has raised up a set of men in all ages, whose study it has been to diffuse knowledge and happiness. Whence is the source of genuine liberality and benevolence, but the gospel? And the more its influence prevails, the more will such characters abound.

(1) What think you then of this King, and of this kingdom? Are you willing that he should reign over you? (2) What think you of salvation in his name? Is he to you as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land; and do you make him your only refuge!

ISRAEL'S DEFECTION AND RECOVERY.

And it came to pass while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long, for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.—1 Samuel vii. 2.

This is an interesting and a useful part of the history of Israel. We here see a great degeneracy, and a great revival following; how the people sinned, and how God forsook them, and gave them over to their enemies. And how, when they returned to him, he forgave them, and blessed them as in the days of old.

I. Let us briefly notice some of the principal events of this interesting period.

1. Observe, *the cause or origin of the defection.* This seems to be traced to the sins of their priests, who were men of Belial: ch. ii. 12. The effect of this was, a contempt of God's worship: ver. 17. Thence followed, ignorance and insensibility; for in their trouble they had no just sense of its cause, ch. iv. 3, and therefore trusted in the ark instead of God. It also appears that they were given to idolatry, and become exceedingly corrupt: ch. vii. 3.

2. In consequence of this defection, *the Lord departed from them.*

They trusted in the ark, and the ark does not save them, but is itself carried into captivity.

They are overthrown with a dreadful slaughter, the two sons of Eli are slain, and the tidings of this calamity are the death of Eli and his daughter in law: ch. iv. 12—22.

On witnessing such a state of things as this, mere human prudence would have said, 'Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon.' But God would suffer the defeat and the disgrace of Israel to be known among their enemies, and let the Philistines triumph.

But the triumph of the wicked should be short. God would know how to vindicate his own honour, how to recover the ark with a trespass offering, and how to save his people.

In the meantime how is it with Israel? If the men of Bethshemesh are a specimen, they were in a poor state. First they discover presumption, in looking into the ark; and then are filled with despair, mixed with self-righteous pride: ch. vi. 19, 20.

And though at Kirjath-jearim the ark rested, yet no mention is made of the attendance of the Levites, who were charged with the care of that sacred relic; but it is suffered to remain neglected for twenty years, and ceases to be the centre of public worship. During this unhappy period too, the people remain in a state of bondage.

3. *A turn is at length given to their affairs,* which commences with their mourning and seeking after the Lord.

The sons of Eli had been the occasion of their defection; and now Samuel is the occasion of their return.

They might indeed lament the absence of the ark, but that was not the chief loss. God had forsaken them, and now they see it, and see the cause to be in themselves. They weep over it, lay their sins to heart, and mourn after the Lord.

Now the words of the prophet will be heard, ver. 3, 4; and the idols put away. Samuel improves the opportunity, ver. 5, 6; yet new dangers still arise, ver. 7.

And now they go to God, and not to the ark, ver. 9. God also now appears in answer to prayer, and they set up their Ebenezer.

II. Apply the subject to ourselves.

1. We may learn from hence, what are the signs of *religious degeneracy.*

When the sins of others cause us to make light of God's ordinances: ch. i. 17.

When we are under the frowns of Heaven, and yet insensible of it, and of the cause: ch. iv. 3.

When we trust in the form of religion instead of God, and still retain our idols: ch. vii. 3.

2. What are the signs of *true repentance*, and of a revival in religion.

It must begin with a return to God, or all our sorrow and grief will be in vain.

It is not enough to confess our departure from him; we must "lament" it, and lay it well to heart.

Nor is it enough to lament the consequences of sin, but "after the Lord."

The men of Bethshemesh lamented the effects of their presumption, while apparently insensible of the guilt they had contracted: ch. vi. 19.

There are some who never knew the Lord, and therefore have not

lamented after him, either for themselves or others. This shows an awful state of impenitence and unbelief. Some have known him, and yet like Israel have forsaken him. It is the duty and interest of such to return and lament, and to seek after the Lord with weeping and with supplication.

CHRIST'S VOLUNTARY HUMILIATION.

He took upon him the form of a servant.—Philippians ii. 7.

There is such an excellency in the knowledge of Christ, that the apostle loves to introduce it on every occasion, and on such occasions as we should be apt to overlook. He is here exhorting to lowliness of mind, and he derives his motives from the example of Christ: ver. 3—7.

If there be any meaning in language, we are here taught the proper deity of Christ; nor can any means avail to overturn it, for it would not be an example of *humility* on any other ground. Two things are here mentioned which fully prove this—

(1) That he was in *the form of God*. This is what he was originally, and by nature: the other is what he was by choice. As “the form of a servant” means that he was truly a servant, so “the form of God” means that he was truly and properly God.

(2) That his becoming a *servant* was not any thing that naturally belonged to him, for he *took* it upon him by voluntary assumption. But if he were only a creature, there was no other form which properly belonged to him but that of a servant; and his being made in “the likeness of men,” could be no instance of humiliation, nor could the reference to such an example have answered the purpose of the sacred writer.

I. Enquire wherein “the form of a servant” consists, and how our blessed Lord sustained that character.

Many things are said of Christ in the Scriptures which may seem hard to be understood, for want of considering things in their proper connection, but which are perfectly consistent with what is said of him in other passages.

1. It properly belongs to the character of a servant, that he *receives his instructions* from him whose servant he is. It is not for the servant to direct, but to receive directions. Thus did Christ. Though as the Son of God he ‘knew all things, knew what was in man, and needed not that any one should testify:’ yet as a servant he taught nothing, but what he ‘heard and learned of the Father.’ John viii. 26, 40. xvii. 8. iii. 32, 32.

2. It belongs to a servant that he acts *in the name* and *under the authority* of him whose servant he is. Though as a divine person, ‘his throne is forever and ever,’ yet as a Son in the capacity of a servant, he ‘learned obedience’ by the things which he suffered.

Our Lord generally ascribed his *miracles* to the power of the Father, and not to his own power; and he is said to have done what he did by the Spirit of God, and by the finger of God.

There were some instances indeed in which the miracles he wrought are ascribed to his own power, to cut off occasion to degrade him; as in the healing of the leper, when he said, 'I will, be thou clean.' But in general the miracles of Christ are ascribed to the power of the Father, and the agency of the Holy Spirit, to show the authority by which he acted, and to demonstrate the divinity of his mission.

Hence he speaks of his being *sent* by the Father, and of the Father's *will* being the rule of his conduct. 'The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do. He came not do his own will, but the will of him that sent him.' John v. 30. vi. 38.

Had it been otherwise, he would not have appeared in the capacity of a servant, but as Lord of all. On the same ground, when the purposes of his mediation are fully accomplished, he will deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all. 1 Cor. xv. 24—28.

3. It is suited to the character of a servant that he be supported in his work by him whose servant he is, and that he be strengthened, encouraged and *rewarded* in all he does: and thus it was with Christ.

As a divine person he is stiled 'Most Mighty,' and is described as 'upholding all things by the word of his power.' Yet during his humiliation he is represented as doing all he did by the power of God the Father, and as being sustained and supported by him. Isai. xlii. 1. xlix. 8.

The prayers of our Lord also show, that he looked to the Father for succour and support in the days of his flesh, and that he acknowledged his dependence upon him. Psal. xx. 1—4. xxii. 1, 19. Heb. v. 7.

All this was consistent with the character which he had assumed, and would not have corresponded with any other.

II. Consider the fitness and propriety of our Lord's taking on him the form of a servant.

1. No other form would have exemplified the *goodness and the glory of the divine government*.

The service of God was fallen into disrepute. The Jewish nation seemed to be all tired of it, and said, 'What a weariness it is. And now it was fit that the incarnate Saviour should honour the authority of the Lawgiver, by showing the practicability of his precepts, and by shedding a lustre on the path of holy obedience.'

Accordingly, by taking on himself the form of a servant, he 'fulfilled all righteousness: he magnified the law, and made it honourable.'

Moreover, there had never been an example of *perfect* obedience since the fall of man. Among all the righteous, there had been none that were absolutely such, no not one. God had never been obeyed as he ought to have been, nor had the excellence of his service been sufficiently illustrated.

Then said the Saviour, 'Lo, I come to do thy will, oh God: thy law is within my heart.' Heb. x. 5—7.

2. No other form but that of a servant would have afforded a *fit medium for the salvation of sinners*.

God delights to confer his favours in reward of righteousness. If man had been a faithful ser-

vant, he would have enjoyed eternal life. Now it becomes a free gift, through the obedience of one; even Jesus Christ; and so it is still bestowed in a way of righteousness. Every blessing is given in his name, and for his sake, and in reward of his obedience. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. Rom. v. 18, 19. 2 Cor. viii. 9.

III. Make some improvement of the subject.

1. We here see *the harmony* there is between Christ's being in "the form of God," and taking on him "the form of a servant;" and that a fair and just interpretation may be given of all those passages of Scripture which have been adduced for the purpose of derogating from the essential dignity and glory of the Son of God. How beautiful and consistent is truth when rightly understood, and how suitable to the character which he assumed are all those representations of his voluntary humility and deep abasement. The sacred writers seem indeed to have taken peculiar delight in dwelling upon the combined and seemingly incompatible attributes which distinguished the character and work of the inimitable Saviour. How disingenuous then, and how guilty the attempt, to infer any thing derogatory to his native dignity, from that voluntary abasement to which he condescended, in order to reach the extremity of our guilt and misery.

2. We see the *peculiar use* to which the Scriptures generally apply the doctrine of *Christ's divinity*. They do not ordinarily ascribe his miracles to it, nor his support in the great work which he undertook, nor his resurrection from the dead. He had power indeed to lay down his life, and to take it up again; but he received it of the Father. But the worth and efficacy of his sufferings are ascribed to his divinity, and this it was that constituted the dignity of his office as High Priest over the house of God. Heb. i. 3. iv. 14. vii. 26. 1 John i. 7. It was on account of his humiliation that God commanded all the angels to worship him; that by how much he had abased himself, so let him be magnified and exalted. Heb. i. 6. Rev. v. 11.

3. In the obedience of Christ a source of *abundant consolation* is provided for perishing sinners, the great object of his humiliation being our salvation. His becoming a servant was to accomplish more than all creation could effect, and it was in submission to the will of the Father that he laid down his life for us. There is now ground for faith and hope in him: no blessing so great but God will freely give it for his sake. In rewarding obedience like his, no expression of divine approbation can be too strong. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Rev. v. 12.

4. We are hereby furnished with a powerful motive to *cheerful and faithful obedience*. Christ is our pattern and example; he has sweetened the work by going before us, and he now says, 'Learn of me.' He has taught us how to bear affliction and reproach, how to encounter and endure temptation: and by stooping to the grave he has softened and perfumed the bed of death.

CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION.

Having your conversation honest among the gentiles; that whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.—1 Peter ii. 12.

The Epistle of Peter is very properly denominated a 'general' one, because it is not addressed to any individual, or particular society of christians, but to strangers that were scattered abroad: ch. i. 1.

It seems in general to be the design of providence, that christians should not dwell together by themselves, but be scattered about like seed in the earth to render it fruitful.

Yet their insulated situation exposes them to various temptations, especially while dwelling "among the gentiles," who would be a snare to them, and afterwards become their accusers, if they could find occasion against them: it is the object of the apostle therefore to guard them against this danger.

I. Explain the exhortation: "Having your conversation honest among the gentiles."

Though they were pilgrims, they were to be conversant with mankind, even the heathen amongst whom they resided. They would sustain various relations in society, the respective duties of which they are required to fulfil.

As subjects, they are to yield submission to the laws: ver. 13—15.

As citizens, they are entitled to a conscientious enjoyment of their liberty: ver. 16.

As neighbours, their conduct is to be kind and courteous: ver. 17.

As fellow christians, they are to exercise fraternal affection one towards another: ver. 17.

As servants, they are to learn subjection: ver. 18.

All this is to constitute that upright and honorable deportment to which they are exhorted in the passage before us.

More particularly, to have "our conversation honest among the gentiles," includes at least three things; namely, truth, justice, and fidelity.

1. *Truth*, or veracity with respect to our words. In some countries, especially in heathen ones, lying is a common custom, unaccompanied with any shame.

An apostle could bear witness, that 'the Cretians are always liars;' and later missionaries can say the same of several heathen nations whom they have visited. Speaking the truth is neither required by their system of morals, nor enforced by the authority of conscience.

But it is not so amongst us, and many would scorn it merely on that account. It is a mean and despicable vice, and sinks a man in the esteem of others; but christians will avoid it from better motives.

There is an evil in lying which the Scriptures have severely noticed. It was awfully punished at the very commencement of the gospel, in the person of Ananias and Saphira, and in a way that should make us tremble. Acts v.

It is also

threatened with the vengeance of eternal fire. Rev. xxi. 8. 27. xxii. 15. No wonder therefore that christians are required to put away lying, and to speak every one truth with his neighbour. Ephes. iv. 25.

But as there are many ways of falsifying the truth, it is necessary to avoid every species of deception; in order to escape the sin of lying. Palliating our faults by vain excuses, is inconsistent with christian sincerity. Flattery offered to another, is an unworthy kind of dissimulation, which christians ought carefully to avoid, as well as every description of vague and equivocating language, used with an intention to deceive.

Lying is an evil to which children are particularly prone, and it requires early correction, by inculcating the importance and necessity of truth. In nothing does the corruption of our nature more evidently appear than in this horrid vice, which is one of the worst ingredients in the human character. It is infamous in any man, and utterly inconsistent with the profession of christianity.

2. The exhortation requires *justice and equity* in our dealings, as well as sincerity and truth in all our conversation. Christians are not to be governed by worldly motives, or worldly maxims, even in their secular concerns. The law which they are to obey is to 'do unto others, as they would that others should do unto them.' They are not suffered to defraud or overreach; to take any undue advantage, or employ any artifice or guile, to secure or promote their worldly interest. 1 Thess. iv. 6.

3. It includes *fidelity* with respect to our trust and engagements. This is a duty of great importance to society, and the affairs of life cannot go on without it. All ranks of men have trusts reposed in them, in a greater or less degree; and fidelity here is of the utmost consequence, whether as servants, as tradesmen, or moving in a higher rank. Titus ii. 9, 10. This indeed is made essential to true religion, nor can it exist with it. Psal. xv.

II. Consider the motives by which the exhortation is enforced.

1. An upright and honest conversation would *stop the mouth of slander*. These primitive christians were 'spoken against as evil doers;' and the best way of answering false accusations is to live them down. Believers are sometimes charged with being enemies to government; and the best answer to this is to live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. 1 Tim. ii. 2. Because they cannot run with others to the same excess of riot, they are reproached with being precise and hypocritical; the best way in this case is to leave revilers to answer for their own conduct. 1 Pet. iv. 4. To attempt a reply to all the railing accusations of an ungodly and unbelieving world, would involve us in endless disputes. But in maintaining an upright and honourable deportment there is no danger, and actions speak louder than words.

2. It would *bring glory to God*, even from their accusers, especially 'in the day of visitation.' This descriptive phrase sometimes refers to God's proceedings with men in a way of mercy, Luke xix. 44:

and sometimes in a way of judgment. Hos. ix. 4. In this place both may be intended, but especially the former. Some

have been allured to the love of religion by the exemplary conduct of those about them: and when this is the case, God is abundantly glorified. 1 Pet. iii. 1.

Others who have not been benefitted by example, have in times of affliction and trouble been compelled to acknowledge the reality and excellency of religion, from what they have observed in the conduct of its genuine professors. The old world, who disregarded Noah's preaching, could not but know, when the flood came, that they were utterly wrong, and that he was right. The inhabitants of

Sodom would have similar convictions, on the dreadful day that Lot entered into Zoar. The convictions of Pharaoh often betrayed

themselves in the presence of Moses and Aaron: and when the mysterious handwriting appeared upon the wall, the consternation of Belshazzar was sufficiently evident.

In all these instances, an involuntary homage is rendered to truth, and the God of truth is glorified in the day of visitation.

But should mercies and judgments in the present world fail to produce this effect, there is another day coming, and another visitation from God, when every mouth will be stopped, and all the world appear guilty before him.

The treatment which primitive believers met with from the unbelieving part of mankind, shows us that the carnal mind is in every age at enmity with God and his people; and that all who would live godly in Christ Jesus, must expect to meet with persecution, in one form or another.

ATTRACTIVE OF THE CROSS.

7 *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*—
John xii. 32.

John delights to dwell on the dying love of Christ, and cannot feel an equal interest on any other subject. In the last ten chapters of his gospel he narrates the principal events of the last few days of our Saviour's life on earth. In this chapter he represents him as having a conflict with nature, ver. 27: and then as uttering the language of victory and triumph: ver. 31.

(1) Observe, the whole of this passage relates to *the effects* of Christ's death, which is mentioned in the present tense by way of anticipation, as if it had already taken place: ver. 31.

(2) *The world* is here considered as Satan's kingdom, and he is called 'the prince' of it. He it is that rules and governs, both among Jews and gentiles. But now by the gospel, his kingdom should be overturned. Now is the cause of rebellion crushed, and the grand usurper is confounded.

(3) The *drawing of all men* to Christ, denotes the influence of the gospel upon men of all nations, who had hitherto been led captive by the devil at his will; but they shall now become attached to Christ, as it is expressed in ch. xi. 48.

I. Consider the description given of true conversion: it consists in our being "drawn to Christ."

We are drawn or influenced by those principles which gain an ascendancy over us, or by those objects which govern our feelings or our interest. Thus the riches of the world allure the hearts of the covetous, its pleasures the mind of the sensualist, and its honours that of the ambitious.

By these mankind are bound to Satan's interest, and held in a state of subjection. A crown of glory has no influence on the carnal mind, which looks only at the things that are seen.

But when a sinner is renewed by grace, and brought to believe in Jesus, the chains are broken, and his heart is smitten with the love of a dying Saviour.

1. Religion had before *no charms*, the world being all in all.

Now that the sinner is converted, the Bible becomes a new book, and every thing is viewed in a new light. The law is seen to be holy, just and good; the gospel is inestimable, and all its promises are found to be exceedingly great and precious.

Now the sinner begins to wonder that he did not see these things before, and is at a loss to account for his past stupidity.

2. The world has now lost *its attraction*, its dominion over the heart is subdued. The believer is crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to him. It is now become subordinate to higher interests, and is used without abusing it, knowing that the fashion thereof passeth away. 1 Cor. vii. 31.

3. The sinner was once drawn away by *self righteousness*, and cleaved to it as containing all his salvation. He thought much of his religious attainments, and highly of himself on account of them. Luke xviii. 11. But now this fine gold is become dim, and he counts all things but loss for Christ. Phil. iii. 8.

4. Once he *cleaved to flesh and blood*, and could not think of parting with friends and relations, father and mother, for Christ's sake and the gospel. He could not forget his father's house, nor think of forsaking Egypt, to endure affliction with the people of God; but like Orpah he must return to his country and to his gods, notwithstanding all his convictions of the truth. But now his heart is so attracted by the Saviour, that the ties of nature themselves begin to loosen; and like Moses and Ruth, he can forsake all for Christ. Psal. xlv. 10. Ruth i. 15, 16. Heb. xi. 24—26.

5. *Religious duties* were once a *burden to him*, and like Doeg he was detained before the Lord. His language was, what a weariness is it, and when will the sabbath be over. But now, holy duties are his delight; and his prayer is like that of the church of old, Draw me, we will run after thee. Cant. i. 4. His heart is so attracted that he can find no such happiness any where else: it is good now to draw near unto God. Psal. lxxiii. 28.

6. Those things which before formed *the greatest objections* to religion, now become matter of choice. He could not bear the reproach, the loss, the shame attending a profession of the gospel. But

now like Moses, he can forsake Egypt; and with Paul, count not his life dear unto him for the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts v. 41. xxi. 13.

7. His heart is so drawn to Christ, that the thoughts of *being with him* are now the sum of his desire. Luke viii. 38. Like Paul, he is even willing to depart, that he may be with Jesus. Phil. i. 23.

II. Notice how the cross of Christ tends to effect this.

The Jews put Christ to death in order to prevent his influence, and to make an end of his kingdom and interest in the world. John xi. 48. xii. 19. But it operated in a very different way: ch. xii. 24. His glory followed up his sufferings, and was to arise out of them; the extension of his kingdom would therefore be a necessary consequence of his death. 1 Pet. i. 11.

1. Christ's being "lifted up" upon the cross would afford *the greatest possible display of love*; and love, of all principles, is the most attractive. It is a melting consideration, that while we were yet enemies, he died for us. Hereby perceive we the love of God; herein indeed is love. Rom. v. 8. 1 John iii. 16. iv. 10.

2. It is through the cross of Christ that we have the words of *pardon, peace, and eternal life*; and these tidings become the grand attractive to lost sinners. See how the gospel allured the hearts of John's disciples, and also those of Jesus. John i. 36—39. vi. 66—69. Hence also the multitudes followed him whithersoever he went: this it was that drew the woman who was a sinner, to weep at his feet, and to wash them with her tears. Luke vii. 47. It is by his being lifted up that he becomes the object of faith; it is by his death that death itself is destroyed, and life and immortality are brought to light. John iii. 13.

3. It was in virtue of this that *the Holy Spirit was imparted*, and this was necessary to render the gospel effectual. It followed it in order of time, that it might appear in the order of nature, or to be the proper effect of it. Without this all the loveliness, and all the love of the Saviour would have no influence: nor would the gospel feast be regarded, but every one would make light of it. Isai. liii. 1. Matt. xxii. 5.

III. The reason we have to expect that this influence shall be extended over all the earth.

Christ's being lifted up has not yet had its full effect: he will eventually "draw all men unto himself"—

1. This is a part of *the promise* made to him by the Father, and the uttermost parts of the earth are to be his possession. Psal. ii. 8. Isai. liii. 12.

2. It agrees with the general tenour of *prophecy*, that to him shall the gathering of the people be. Gen. xlix. 10. Dan. ii. 35. vii. 27. Mic. iv. 8. Rev. xi. 15.

We may learn from hence——(1) That the way of salvation is Christ and him crucified——(2) That the great object of the christian ministry is to exhibit the doctrine of the cross, as the means of converting sinners unto God——(3) That where this doctrine is faithfully preached, there is encouragement to hope it shall never be in vain.

DESTRUCTION OF ANTICHRIST.

But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume, and to destroy it unto the end.—Daniel vii. 26.

Though it would be improper to indulge in presumptuous speculations on the mysteries of providence, which would lead our minds away from the simplicity that is in Christ, we are not to be unmindful of the signs of the times, nor of the operations of God's hand. Psal. xxviii. 5. The Scriptures provide nothing for our curiosity, but much for our faith. Prophecy is a light shining in a dark place, to which we do well to take heed, till the day dawn and the day star arise in our hearts. In some instances we may compare prophecy and facts together, and so derive instruction from them.

I. Briefly notice some of the principal events to which the text may refer.

1. It is clear that the vision of the *four beasts*, in ver. 1—8, refers to the four great monarchies or governments which from that time nearly to the present have ruled the world; Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The vision is in fact a repetition of Nebuchadnezzar's dream: ch. ii.

2. It is equally clear that the *three first* of these kingdoms, which succeeded each other, have passed away. Where now are ancient Babylon and Persia that ruled the earth; and where are all the conquests of Alexander.

3. The fourth and last *beast with ten horns*, is explained by the angel to mean ten kings or kingdoms, and which clearly refer to the kingdoms of Europe which arose out of the ruins of the Roman empire, and which under different forms of government still constitute the kingdom of the beast: ver. 23, 24.

4. The *little horn*, ver. 8, which came up among them, describes the rise of the *antichrist*, which from small beginnings obtained the ascendancy over the ten kingdoms. The three that fell before him were Lombardy, the Exarchate of Ravenna, and what are now called the States of the Church; and hence the sovereign pontiff assumed the triple crown. The character of the antichristian kingdom, or the dominion of the little horn, is, that it has 'the eyes of a man' for sa-

gacity; and 'a mouth speaking great things,' pretending to possess the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and to exercise supreme dominion upon earth.

The papal power also makes war with the saints, and speaks great words against the Most High: ver. 21, 25.

His duration is limited to a thousand and two hundred years, ver. 25: and probably the eastern or Turkish antichrist is included in the same destiny. They rise and fall nearly together.

At the expiration of this term, what is recorded in our text will come to pass; and this appears to be applicable to the present times.

II. Notice the peculiarity of the terms by which the fall of the anti-christian power is expressed.

Three things are here remarkable—

1. It is represented as the result of a *judicial sentence*, to be executed by the special interposition of providence.

"The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion." This is the same as in ver. 9, where the thrones are pitched down, and the Ancient of days presides in judgment.

This solemn process gives an importance to the event, like that of trying a great state criminal. It is a time for the inquisition of blood, the judgment prayed for by the martyrs. Psal. ix. 12. Rev. vi. 10. xviii. 8. xix. 2, 3.

2. *Instruments are provided* for the execution of this sentence.

We are not told who or what they are; but "they" shall take away his dominion.

From other Scriptures however we learn, that those who gave their power to the beast shall be the first to hate the whore, and to burn her flesh with fire. Rev. xvii. 16.

The European governments are undoubtedly intended; and as France took the lead in supporting the papal dominion by a special grant of temporalities, that country is probably destined to perform a distinguished part in its destruction.

3. The fall of antichrist is described as being *gradual*. First, its "dominion is taken away:" and this, so far as its temporal power is concerned, has been accomplished in our times, by revolutionary France.

The tendency of this is to "consume and to destroy it unto the end."

This consumption and destruction may be of two kinds: the one to be effected by some certain events in providence, which shall consume and destroy the body of antichrist; the other by the general diffusion of the gospel, which shall consume and destroy the soul and spirit of all false religion. 2 Thess. ii. 8.

Here then we see whereabouts things are: the dominion of the western antichrist is taken away: nothing remains but that it be consumed and destroyed "unto the end." Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: ver. 27.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) We here see the truth of the Scriptures. Who but God could have foretold what is recorded in this chapter, and in the text under con-

sideration? And from what has been already fulfilled, we may conclude that all the rest will shortly come to pass: the time cannot be far distant.

(2) Whatever may take place as to particular nations, in our own or other countries, there is a ground of hope laid for us as christians. We may suffer much from the calamities which are to come upon the kingdom of antichrist, and it becomes us not to be high minded, but to fear. If trying times should come, let us remember what is written for our encouragement; let us be disengaged from the world, and set our affections on things above. Isai. xxxiii. 14. Heb. xii. 28.

IMPORTANCE OF EARLY PIETY.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.—Ecclesiastes xii. 1.

This book was written in Solomon's old age, and is chiefly addressed to young people, especially this chapter. He here admonishes them not to forget God, nor to offer to him the mere refuse of life, but to consecrate themselves to his service in the beginning of their days.

I. Attentively consider the counsel given: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

God was chiefly known at that time under the character of a "Creator," and was not much known under any other. Had Solomon lived in our day, he would probably have expressed himself in different language. You would have been called upon not only to remember your Creator, but your Redeemer, and him more especially. But if you remember your Creator, you will not forget your Redeemer: the one prepares the way for the other. Hence it is life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

There is a painful truth *implied* in this exhortation, which we must not overlook; and that is, that God is too generally forgotten, especially by young people. In many instances their minds are dissipated, and in all cases alienated from the life and love of God, so as to remember any thing rather than him. His mercies are all forgotten when they are past, his judgments when out of sight. This shows the alienation of the heart from him, for it could not be so if we knew and loved him as we ought. God is not within the reach of our senses, and we are taken up with the things that are seen, and which are temporal.

What is it then to *remember* our Creator? Not merely to think of him now and then, as you would of any indifferent object: but to think of God with affection and delight; to think of him as you would of an absent friend, of your best and only friend, so as never to forget him, nor lose sight of him.

More particularly—

1. If you rightly remember your Creator, you will think of his *goodness and forbearance towards you*. You will be affected to think how often and how long he has borne with you while others are cut off, and this will lead you to repentance for all your ungrateful returns. You will be ashamed and confounded for your past follies; like Ephraim you will smite upon your thigh, and bear the reproach of your youth. Jer. xxxi. 19.

2. If you remember your Creator, you will think of his holy *precepts and ordinances*, to observe and to do them. You will keep holy the sabbath day, and love the name of the Lord. You will desire to seek him, to hear his word, to frequent his courts, and make his service your chief delight.

3. You will think of the *calls and warnings* which you have neglected. You will recollect the various providences which tended to awaken your fears, and lead you to repentance, and how you disregarded them. You will mourn over the hardness of your heart, to think how you could be so unwise as to set at nought God's counsel, and would have none of his reproof. This will cause you to mourn, and to seek for mercy.

4. You will think of your *past sins*, will be *humbled for them*, and seek forgiveness through the Mediator. You will have no peace till you are reconciled to God, till sin is pardoned and subdued, and you have found favour in his sight. You will be troubled in spirit till he is pacified towards you for all your offences, and has made you accepted in the Beloved.

II. Notice the importance of the advice given in the text, especially to young people.

There are many *excuses* made for forgetting God, particularly in early life. The flesh pleads for a little longer indulgence.

The world pleads that it is hard, if young people may not pursue their pleasures.

And when conscience is distressed for sin, they propose something or other to seek the Lord in earnest, and to lay these things to heart: but it is time enough yet. But hear the counsel of God, sounding in the text.

God is your *Creator*, and therefore you ought not to forget him.

Amongst men there is something very tender in the name of father; but how much more to consider the divine Being under this character. Your earthly parents are only the means of good to you. God is the author of your existence, and of all your mercies; and he has been your Father. He has guarded you from innumerable dangers, supplied your daily wants, endured all your sins and provocations. He has been better to you, infinitely better, than any earthly friend or parent could be: and how then can you forget him.

What can be said of a man who forgets his father that begot him, and his mother that bare him? What then shall be said of him who forgets his Creator? What awful ingratitude! 'If I be a Master, where is my fear? If I be a Father, where is mine honour?'

But consider more particularly the great importance of remembering God your Creator, "now in the days of your youth."

1. Now is *the only time* of which you can be certain. 'Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.' You are here to-day, but to-morrow you may become a corpse. Many who have been as healthy, as strong, and as gay as you are, have been taken away with a stroke. Now therefore is the accepted time, and this is the day of salvation. To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Death generally comes at a time least expected.

2. Youth is the time when *desires and hopes of happiness* are the strongest. Then it is that the anxious enquiry is made, Who will show us any good! Young people do not look for trouble, but for happiness, and this is the object of their pursuit. Well, it is in God only that you can find it; all else are broken cisterns.

3. Youth is the time in which the heart commonly *makes its choice*, the time for warm affection and ardent friendship. Choose God then for your friend, and let him be thy companion for life.

4. That also is a time of the *greatest danger*. Young people are attended with many temptations and snares, and exposed to 'youthful lusts.' You are about to launch into the ocean of life: oh how important to have God for your pilot, your guardian, and your guide. Remember then, his omniscience and his power are your only safeguard amidst all these dangers.

5. If you remember him not in the days of your youth, it is not likely that you will do so at all, but will most probably *forget God all the days of your life afterwards*. When the flower of life is gone, there is but little hope of a person's conversion and salvation.

The far greater part of those who are truly brought to seek the Lord are brought in early life, before they have plunged deep into the cares of the world; and it seldom happens that any one is converted at a later period.

6. If you should even be called in old age, you will *not then be capable of doing much for God*. It will then be matter of deep regret, that you have nothing to present but the refuse of life. The first fruits are gone to the service of sin, and you will have nothing to offer but the blind and the lame for sacrifice. Now is the time for holy activity: give unto the Lord the first fruits of thine increase, and let him have the dew of thy youth.

Beware then of despising or neglecting the solemn counsel of the wise and aged king. You may think to go on at present 'in the way of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.' Eccles. xi. 9.

How happy are those who have feared the Lord from their youth, are now in old age bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Such may well say, The outward man perisheth, but the inward man is renewed day by day. My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

JACOB'S REVIEW OF HIS PAST LIFE.

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant ; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau ; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children..—Genesis xxxii. 10, 11.

The lives of the patriarchs form a most interesting part of sacred history. While the men of the world were struggling for empire, and grasping after riches, as they do now, the holy patriarchs were exercising mercy, and walking humbly with God. That part of Jacob's life in particular, which we are about to consider, is highly instructive. We here see the way he took in times of great difficulty and danger. After using all prudent means to avert the evil that was apprehended, he betakes himself to prayer, and makes the most high God his refuge. Here also we see the efficacy of the prayer of faith. In pleading with God, Jacob fails not to mention the covenant made with his fathers, together with the special promises made to himself; and in this he is heard and answered: ver. 9, 12.

I. Consider the passage before us as containing Jacob's review of his past life.

Three things may here be observed—his recollection of God's mercy and truth towards him—the sense he had of his own utter unworthiness—and his plea from the past to the future.

1. His recollection of *the mercy and the truth* which the Lord made to pass before him. Both these are covenant terms ; and we

have all our mercies now by covenant, and not merely in a way of bounty. In this light Jacob viewed all the good that he possessed, and could say with an apostle, By the grace of God I am what I am.

"Mercy" relates to the making of promises, and "truth" to their performance. It was great mercy that was shown to Jacob at Bethel, where the Lord renewed to him the covenant made with his father ; and during the last twenty years of his life, he had seen the truth of all these promises ; and to both he now refers with unfeigned gratitude. Gen. xxviii. 13—22

He was once poor, and possessed nothing but a shepherd's crook or "staff," with which he passed over Jordan : now he is increased in riches, and become "two bands," and is deeply affected with a sense of the divine goodness, ascribing all that he possessed, both temporal and spiritual, to the loving-kindness and faithfulness of God : ch. xlviii. 16.

1. The patriarch acknowledges *his utter unworthiness* of all his mercy and truth.

God's servants have always entertained this view of themselves, and it is fit they should do so, for there is no comparison between divine goodness and human desert. Matt. viii. 8. 2 Cor. xii.

11. Jacob was not only a sinner like other men, but had acted an unworthy part in his father's house; and the remembrance of this would strengthen the conviction of his own unworthiness. Gen. xxv. 29—34. xxvii 18—24.

3. His appeal from *the past to the future*. "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau." God had been merciful, and now he prays that he would be merciful again: he had been faithful to his word, and is entreated to be faithful still. Notwithstanding all Jacob's unworthiness, the Lord has kept covenant with him; and the patriarch makes this a plea for present deliverance and for future mercy.

II. Consider the subject as applicable to ourselves.

It is good for us, as well as for Jacob, to review our past experience, for the purpose of exciting humble gratitude, and holy confidence in God.

1. Is there no covenant *mercy and truth* to be recollected by us, as well as by Jacob? No doubt there is much, both in a way of providence and grace. The continuance of the seasons, and the bountiful goodness which they afford, are the effect of covenant mercy and truth to Noah and his posterity. We may look to the bow in the cloud, and remember this. Gen. ix. 15—17. The blessings bestowed upon us individually, are also the effect of covenant mercy. Some perhaps can recollect the time when they were poor and destitute like Jacob, walking by the way side with a staff, and are now become the head of a family, and well provided for. And should it not be recollected also, that it is the Lord who maketh poor, and maketh rich?

It is not necessary, however, to confine 'the mercy and the truth' to things of this life. Let us rather consider the greatest of all mercies, the gift of Christ to die for us, which is comprehensive of all other gifts. Herein indeed was love; and the kindness of God our Saviour towards man appeared in its richest form. 1 John iv. 19. Titus iii. 4.

This was itself a flood of mercy; and there was no less of truth than of mercy, in fulfilling all the promises made to Abraham and his seed. Mic. vii. 20. Luke i. 72, 73.

Add to this the setting up of Christ's kingdom among the gentiles bestowing upon us the grace of regeneration, keeping us from apostasy while so many have turned aside and withholding no good thing from them that walk uprightly.

In all this there is abundance of mercy towards us, and of covenant faithfulness towards the Lord Jesus.

2. Are we *less unworthy* of these blessings than Jacob was?

In one view we stand on the same ground with him, seeing that every sinner is unworthy of the least of all God's mercies: and if we consider the part which we have acted individually towards God, how much more! We must all plead guilty and unworthy; we are all unprofitable servants, and must still go to God as sinners, pleading for mercy in the Saviour's name. 1 Tim. i. 15.

3. May we not, as well as Jacob, convert the past into a *plea for future mercy*. We have our dangers and difficulties as individuals, and as members of society: but as God has been kind and faithful, and this

notwithstanding all our unworthiness, we may hope and trust in him to the end. 2 Cor. i. 10. Psal. xlviii. 14.

After all, it should be our great concern to be found amongst God's covenant people, and to be visited with the favour which he beareth to his chosen. Psal. cvi. 4, 5. Otherwise, though we share in their privileges, it will be only for their sake, without possessing any personal interest ourselves; and this would only tend to aggravate our future condemnation. Matt. xi. 23.

THE SINNER'S AWFUL DANGER.

Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?—Matthew iii. 7.

The gospel is introduced by the forerunner of Christ, who as the morning star prepared the way for the Sun of righteousness; but when the Sun was risen, his light was lost in the meridian splendour.

Among the converts of John there were some who afforded him but little pleasure. They seemed to think that if any thing of importance was going forward, they must need have some concern in it: but John saw nothing in them worthy of repentance. On the contrary, they were full of self-righteous pride: he therefore reprov'd them, and expressed his surprise at their coming to his baptism. His language to them in effect is, 'Who would have thought of *your* coming to this ordinance; as if the kingdom of heaven could comport with your pharisaical spirit, and unbelieving temper! Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.'

The question may however furnish us with some important matter of instruction—

1. It is implied, that as sinners we are exposed to the wrath to come.

"Wrath," when predicated of the supreme Being, includes nothing of an evil passion, as it commonly does amongst men; it is an expression of his righteous displeasure against sin. God hates iniquity, and has declared his determination to punish it: his judgment is revealed from heaven, in all the threatenings and curses of his word, and in many of the dispensations of his providence.

To be exposed to the wrath of a fellow creature, is often very distressing. The wrath of a king is as the roaring of a lion; and that of one nation against another is still more dreadful. Yet how trifling is all this, compared with the wrath and fury of an angry God.

There are several reasons in particular, why his wrath ought to be the principal object of our dread—

1. Because of *his power*. That which makes the wrath of a king as the roaring of a lion, is the power which he possesses. But what is that in comparison of the wrath of God. We are made

to feel even in this world how easy it is for him to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity : he can pour out his vials upon the world, and spread destruction over all nations. Yet all the judgments inflicted on mankind in the present life are only 'the hidings of his power,' only the touch of his hand. Hab. iii. 4. Psal. civ. 32. cxliv. 5.

Future punishment will be the display of his power, and of the vengeance of his arm. 'Strong is the Lord God that judgeth—they shall be banished from the glory of his power.' 2 Thess. i. 8.

2. His *justice*. If his wrath were the effect of caprice, or of mere sovereignty, we might be able to endure it. It could not deprive us of inward peace, whatever we might suffer : the consciousness of suffering either without or beyond our desert, would support us under it. But justice gives to punishment all its edge : the rebukes of a just man are severely felt, and the conviction of full desert will render future punishment insupportable.

3. His *goodness* : this is more still. Even the blessings of his providence, with which he has daily loaded us, will tend to make his wrath more dreadful. But 'the wrath of the Lamb' is goodness itself inflamed, and love turned into inexorable vengeance ; and this will be far more awful than any other expression of the divine displeasure. John iii. 19. Rev. i. 7. vi. 16, 17.

4. It is also called *the wrath to come*. There have been many expressions of wrath in this world ; but these are only the beginnings of sorrow. Wrath to come implies the reservation of wrath ; for the present it is restrained ; but like a cloud that has been long gathering, it will fall the heavier when it comes. It will always be wrath to come, wrath without end ; the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.

II. The warning implies that at present there is a way of escape.

This is revealed in the gospel, which tells us of a Saviour ; even Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. 1 Thess. i. 10.

This was John's errand, to testify of him ; and this is the great object of divine revelation.

Christ is the city of refuge, the little Zoar that is provided for the inhabitants of Sodom. Heb. vi. 18.

He is the ark in the midst of the deluge, where safety alone is found. Phil. iii. 9.

By bearing our sins, and the punishment that was due to them, he has saved us from the curse.

By dying he saved us from death : being made a sacrifice, he has saved us from becoming one : and now he sends his gospel, beseeching us to be reconciled to God.

III. We are warned to acquiesce in the way of salvation, and to flee as for our lives.

The Lord deals with us as men, by motives ; and if we be finally lost, we cannot say that we were not warned of our danger. It will be impossible for any of us to plead this, let the issue be what it may.

God has warned us of his solemn determination to punish sin

of the greatness of that punishment of the impossibility of escaping by any other means than what the gospel prescribes of the present life being the only period of mercy ; and that if to-day we will hear his voice, and turn to him, he will pour out his Spirit unto us. Prov. i. 23. 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. Heb. iii. 7, 8.

God has warned us not only by his word, but by his messengers, and by his various judgments in the earth. We are hereby made to see what he can do, and what he will do.

IV. It is implied, that some will be found, who, notwithstanding all, do not take warning, and who will at last be lost in consequence.

The old world was warned by Noah, all the while the ark was building ; yet they took no notice of it, but continued in their evil way till the flood came. Lot's sons were warned by a special message from heaven ; yet they persisted in their unbelief, and perished.

The state of the inhabitants of Sodom too much resembles ours ; they were eating and drinking, and going on as usual, the same as if no warning had been given, and perished at last in their impenitence.

The pharisees and sadducees were warned by John ; and yet they were unmoved by it : they came indeed to make a profession, and be his disciples, but their hearts were not changed.

The Sadducees were a kind of sceptics : they believed in nothing, and doubted of every thing of importance. And where this spirit prevails, the truth makes no impression.

The Pharisees were more devout ; yet neither are they moved by the ministry of John, but thought themselves secure. A spirit of self-righteousness is as opposite to the gospel as that of open infidelity, and those who imbibe it are generally the farthest off from the kingdom of heaven.

These two characters comprise nearly the whole of the world : they are either men of no religion, or men of false religion.

(1) We may from hence learn the origin of all true religion ; it is seeing our danger as sinners, and fleeing to the city of refuge, the hope set before us is the gospel.

(2) Let us remember that the way of escape is only open to us in the present life : all beyond is inexorable justice, unmixed with the hope of mercy.

PETER'S TEMPTATION.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not : and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.—Luke xxii. 31, 32.

In this part of the evangelic history we see things fast approaching to a crisis. The hour and power of darkness is now at hand, and the prince of this world cometh. He came once before, during the temptation in the wilderness ; but there is a difference in the manner of his coming. He came at first as a wily serpent, now as a roaring lion. His temptations were then adapted to awaken hope, now to inspire fear : then he attacked the leader only, now both the leader and his followers. Our Lord was himself invulnerable, the tempter ‘ found nothing in him ;’ but it would not be so with his disciples.

In the text there are three things in particular which deserve attention—the malignity of the tempter—the moral state of the tempted—and the mercy of the Saviour towards him.

I. The malignity of the tempter : “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.”

1. Observe the *extent* of this desire. The enmity of the tempter might be directed more especially against Peter, but not against him only : he was not content with one, he wanted all of them. Though none are exempt from the malignity of the tempter, yet some are more immediately the object of his hatred, especially such as stand foremost in the army of the faithful, and are likely to become formidable in their opposition to his interest.

2. The *cause* of it : why did he desire to have them ? Because they were the friends of Christ. This is sufficient to expose any one to Satan’s malice, and to the malice of all those who are of his spirit. Satan desires the souls of all men : but the ungodly are already in his possession, and become his willing captives. He is not said to desire the chief priest, nor the rulers, nor the pharisees, nor even Judas : no. He and they were like the empty house, swept and garnished, into which he could enter at any time. Satan could bear with them very well, but not with the followers of Jesus : he therefore longs chiefly to overtake those whom he had lost, and whom Christ had taken from him. Not only good men are the object of his desire, but such as are eminently so : and if he can but have them, he gains the greater triumph.

3. The *object* of this desire ; that he might “sift them as wheat.” Not to separate the chaff, though by the overruling hand of God such an end might be accomplished, but to prove and try them, and to see what they were. Satan has tempted and tried many, and found them but chaff ; and he could not tell but the disciples might

prove the same, or be induced at least to dishonour Christ. Thus it is that the church has been sifted in time of persecution; and strong temptation, and the aboundings of error.

4. The *time* when this desire was manifested. This was chosen as the most opportune, when the Lord should be separated from them, and they would be exposed to the power of the adversary. While he was with them in the world, he kept them in his Father's name, and Satan was aware of that. But now the Shepherd would be smitten, and a general attack made upon the flock. It was also to be at the time when Judas had betrayed his Master, and while he was brought before the chief priests to be condemned. Now therefore was the hour and the power of darkness, for a breach was apparently made in the citadel.

II. The moral state of the tempted.

Though the warning given by our Lord was addressed to all the disciples, yet it had a special regard to Peter, as he was supposed to be most in danger, though himself the least aware of it. The repetition of the address, "Simon, Simon," implies much: and two things in particular are observable respecting him—

1. There was in Peter a sincere and ardent *love to Christ*, and that in a high degree. Paul could say no more than this, 'that he was ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus:' and Peter could say as much. Acts xxi. 13. Luke xxii. 34.

2. There was, unhappily, too much *confidence* in that love, and too little diffidence of himself. The ardour of his feelings carried him so far as to educe an unseemly comparison between himself and his brethren; 'though all men should deny thee, yet will not I.' This may teach us to beware of depending on inherent grace, or the happiest frame of mind, neither of which can secure us against the power of temptation.

III. The mercy of the Saviour towards the tempted.

1. He *warned* Peter, and all the rest, giving them timely notice of the approach of the adversary. The proper use of this warning would have been prayer and watchfulness, which might have prevented the effects of the temptation; forewarnings do not necessarily imply the occurrence of the evil foretold, as is evident in the case of Hezekiah's sickness and death, as well as in other instances. Isai. xxxviii. 1—3, 21. 1 Sam. xxiii. 10—13.

2. He warned them *in such terms* as clearly show how much we are all indebted to him for our continual preservation. Peter and his brethren little thought how they were preserved by the tempter being kept at a distance from them; and we also think but little of it; yet so it is. Satan can touch none but by divine permission, as was the case with Job: ch. i. 9—12. He has "desired" you, asked for you, and for all that love the Saviour; and we should often fall into his hands, were it not for the watchful care of the great Shepherd.

Hence we are taught that daily prayer, Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

3. Though it was judged proper, for Peter's chastisement and humiliation, to *grant Satan his desire* in this instance, yet it was designed ultimately to accomplish an important end, as in the case of Job.

Satan desired all the disciples: one only is granted, and that one shall be kept in the hour of temptation.

Peter's faith did not fail him, though his courage did. The Saviour had his eye upon him; and though thrown down, he was not destroyed.

What a mercy that we have an Intercessor who knows all things, all our temptations, trials, and dangers.

Peter, not knowing what was before him, would not have prayed against this hour of darkness: but "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." And the trial of it being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, it shall be found at last unto praise, and honour, and glory.

4. He was counselled to *make a good use* of this great temptation. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Peter on his restoration did not forget this advice: he was more courageous than ever he had been before, and yet more diffident and humble and circumspect. His brethren he admonished of their danger, 1 Peter i. 17, while he encouraged them by his own heroic example.

This instance of human frailty, combined with so much real excellence, lends the most powerful motives to the exhortation of an apostle, to restore a fallen brother in the spirit of meekness and love. Gal. vi. 1.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE REPENTANCE.

In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.—Jeremiah l. 4, 5.

Jeremiah was a weeping prophet, and lived in an evil day; but it pleased the Lord to cheer him with the prospect of better times, when both Israel and Judah should be brought to true repentance.

I. Consider the text as a prophecy of Israel's return from Babylon.

Here we may notice the following things—

1. The *time* when it should take place. "In those days, and at that time;" that is, when Babylon should be besieged and taken, ver. 2, 3.

The destruction of cities and nations is often overruled for the good of the church, and the fall of spiritual Babylon is the signal for the spread of the gospel. Rev. xix.

2. The captivity issued in the *union of all the tribes*. "Israel and Judah" are now reconciled to each other. This is an object which never could be accomplished before, since the time of Rehoboam; but now they are of one heart.

The people of God have often been united by persecution, and mutual adversity; and affliction has brought those together who were before at variance.

3. What is still better, they are recovered to a *right spirit towards God*. They now have a broken and contrite heart, "going and weeping" together. They wept when they went down to Babylon, under all their losses and calamities, and hung their harps upon the willows: they also wept while they were there. Psal. cxxxvii. 1—3.

But why do they weep now, seeing they had so much reason to rejoice. Oh they remember their sins with bitterness of soul, and a sense of mercy melts them into repentance. Going and weeping, they "seek the Lord their God," beseeching him to prosper their way, and to return and dwell with them as in the days of old. It was the expression of love, as well as of sorrow.

4. In going home to their own land, their hearts were not so much set on returning to their temporal possessions, as to their *religious privileges* and enjoyments. "They ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." The ways of Zion had long been unoccupied, and laid waste, and they had almost forgotten them; but now they enquire the way.

5. They strengthen *each other's hands* in the good work; inviting each other, saying, "come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord."

This was a sweet evidence of their mutual affection.

6. They renewed a solemn *covenant with God*, hoping never to depart from him any more; and this engagement was happily fulfilled. Neh. ix. 10.

II. View the text as containing a description of true repentance.

Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, are the great essentials of salvation. Except we repent, we must inevitably perish: and he that believeth not on the Son of God, shall not see life.

The operations of true repentance have been seen in the case of individuals, and here they appear in a whole body of people; but whatever difference there may be in the circumstances of the two cases, there still are many points of resemblance.

1. Repentance appears in a *desire of returning to God*. Man is born and grows up, so to speak, with his back towards God. He is ever going the downward road, and getting farther off. Repentance brings us to our right mind, like the prodigal, and sends us back again to our Father's house. Under whatever exercises of soul, if repentance be genuine, there is this "coming, going, weeping, and seeking the Lord." This it is that distinguishes godly sorrow from the sorrow of the world, which produces despair, and drives the soul farther off from God.

2. It consists in a *spirit of deep contrition*: "going and weeping."

Many things concur at such a time to melt the heart, particu-

larly the remembrance of past sins and their peculiar aggravations. their nature, their number, All this is heightened by the display of mercy through a Mediator, and the hope of free and full forgiveness. With these tears there is a sweet mixture of self-abhorrence, self-abasement, gratitude, hope, and joy.

3. True repentance is incorporated with *a spirit of love and attachment to the people of God*. Past enmities and animosities are all forgotten: the "children of Israel and of Judah" are all one. The distinction of Jews and Samaritans is no more: there is neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian, Seythian, bond nor free. If jealousies and animosities arise afterwards, it is owing to the want of more religion.

4. There is an earnest *seeking after God* in all the means of divine appointment. That spirit of pride which heretofore prevented is now subdued. There is no longer that worldly spirit which seeks after other things in preference to the things of God; but while many are saying, Who will show us any good; the penitent is breathing out his desire, and saying, Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. There is no longer that careless spirit which treats God's favour and promises as not worth seeking after; but when he says, Seek ye my face, the heart replies, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.

5. It sets *the heart towards heaven*, and heavenly objects, even as the returning captives had their faces Zion-ward. If ever we are brought to repentance, we shall turn our backs on the world as they did theirs on Babylon; and our faces towards heaven as they did theirs towards Zion. Those also who stedfastly set their face towards the heavenly country shall find it. The great difficulty in the way to heaven is the want of a heart to walk in it; the wayfaring man though a fool shall not err therein.

6. True repentance awakens *a spirit of enquiry*, and gives an earnest desire to be made acquainted with the way of salvation. If our affections be fixed on things above, we shall assuredly set out on the spiritual pilgrimage; and if at a loss, shall "ask the way to Zion."

We shall enquire of the prophets, and they will tell us; of the apostles, and they will direct us to the Lamb of God. John i. 36. Acts xvi. 32. Or if we ask the Saviour, he will lead us in the way. Matt. xi. 29. If we enquire of living characters, such as are truly walking in the way, they will tell us, whether ministers or private christians. Neither will they perplex us, for they are all of one mind, and teach the same thing.

7. It is accompanied with *a spirit of benevolence* towards others, and an anxious concern for their spiritual welfare. Israel and Judah joined hands in the good work, and encouraged each other in the way to Zion, saying, Come and let us go up. This also is the language of the penitent to those about him, to the negligent, the timid, and the hesitating.

8. The issue of true repentance is the *joining of ourselves to the Lord* in a perpetual covenant. The Lord says of such, 'They shall be my people, and I will be their God.' In this they cordially acquiesce, engaging to follow the Lord fully, and to walk with him through life. This covenant is made by solemn vows in private, as well as by a public profession of Christ, and becoming one with his

people. It is also a "perpetual covenant," not for a few days, but for life, like the Hebrew servant who loved his master, and desired not to go out free any more.

Do we know these things experimentally; or are we yet with our backs toward Zion, and so at ease in Babylon? Oh come out of her, that ye partake not of her plagues. Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

MOSES'S INTERCESSION FOR ISRAEL.

The Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiffnecked people. Now therefore let me alone. that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand. Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swearest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it forever. And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.—Exodus xxxii. 9—14.

We often pray, both for ourselves and others, and yet meet with but little success. It may therefore be worth while to examine the Scriptures, to see what kind of prayer the Lord has heard. It is remarkable, that most of the prayers left on record have been successful ones, for others would scarcely have been worth recording. In looking into them we may be able to find something of great importance, to assist us in this sacred exercise.

Several prayers were answered in the lives of the patriarchs, especially Jacob; and they were all of them prayers of faith. Such was the prayer of Jabez in particular, and this of Moses is another. Israel had sinned: God had threatened them: Moses intercedes: and God is gracious to them.

I. Notice the leading principle of the intercession, and this we shall find to be a disinterested regard for the name of the Lord.

1. Moses *declines the honour* proposed to be conferred on his name.

He had by faith already refused a crown : this was great. Heb. xi. 24. Now he has the offer of being made the father of God's nation, that birthright which Esau despised. Moses knew how to estimate such a favour, but modestly declines it. A vain mind would have accepted it; or if not, would have said something about it; but on that head Moses is perfectly silent. It is a proof of the inspiration of the Scriptures that God in them is all, and his servants nothing, and nothing is said about them.

2. His pleading with God on behalf of Israel, *from what he had already done for them*, is deserving of attention : ver. 11. Some men have pretended to be unwilling to receive worldly honours, even while they have been the object of intense desire and pursuit; but Moses was in real earnest. He used all his interest with God, and "besought" him not to cast away his people. His plea is not founded on any worthiness of his own, but on what God had already done for Israel. The honour of the divine name is the ground of his intercession; and as God had laid the foundation of this new structure, in forming a people for himself, let it not be said that he was unable to finish it.

3. His pleading *what would be said by the Egyptians*, still manifests his concern for the divine glory : ver. 12. What would they say? That which would be very unjust. If the Israelites perished in the wilderness, they would overlook the cause, and say that he brought them out on purpose to "slay them in the mountains." In this way it is that men now speak of future punishment, when God's judgments are denounced against the wicked. Overlooking the cause, when they hear of the perdition of ungodly men, they say, Then God made man on purpose to slay and destroy them. Such would be the perverse construction of unbelievers, as well as of the Egyptians concerning Israel. Moses therefore pleads that God would not suffer them to have such an occasion for reproaching his holy name, but that he would have mercy and spare his people.

4. He pleads *the covenant made with the patriarchs*, ver. 13; and this also shows his disinterested regard for the honour of the divine name. It is true the people of Israel would have descended from the patriarchs, if Moses had been made the founder and the father of that nation; but then the names of their ancestors would have been forgotten, and Moses would have been all. His plea also implies, that not only would the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob be forgotten; but what was much more, the name of the Lord would be dishonoured, in suffering his promises to the patriarchs to be unfulfilled.

II. Apply these remarks to the prayers and supplications which we ourselves offer.

We are constantly interceding for others or praying for ourselves, if we are real christians; and it becomes us to learn from these examples how to succeed, and how to find acceptance with God.

1. When we pray for *mankind* in general, we must not side with them, and merely pity them, but must plead the promises of God to the world,

and what he will do for the sake of his well-beloved Son. That system of religion which considers men as unfortunate, rather than as deeply criminal, is essentially defective, and subversive of the gospel.

2. When we plead for *our own country*, we must use no plea but what is derived from the word of God. We may think of it as renowned for greatness, but this is nothing in his sight, before whom all the nations of the earth are less than nothing and vanity. Isai. xiii. 19. We may think of it as a gourd that shelters us, and pity its misfortunes: but in interceding for Sodom, Abraham made no mention of its being an Eden for the righteous who were in it. God had promised to bless them, and others for their sake; and this was his only plea. This also must be ours, in the intercessions we offer for our unhappy country.

Also when we plead against an enemy, it must not be as ours, but as God's enemy. Isai. xxxvii. 4.

3. In praying for *the revival and prosperity of religion* amongst us, it must not be as our cause, but as God's cause. We may plead the promises made to Christ, or to the church of God, or to his faithful servants; and may mention what the Lord has already done for his people, as Moses did: but in all things a supreme regard must be had to the glory of God. Psal. lxxix. 8. lxxxv. 1, 6. Isai. liii. 10—12. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

4. In pleading for *our families*, we must love them, but not plead merely from natural affection, because they are ours, but from higher motives, urging such considerations as relate to the name of the Lord.

He had promised a succession of people to fear and serve him amongst Abraham's posterity, Isai. xlv. 3, 4: and this was made a plea in the prayers of the godly, Psal. xc. 16.

And though we have not the same ground to expect a succession in any nation or family as Abraham had, yet we are directed to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and are assured that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

We may also plead their being committed to our trust, and our need of grace and wisdom to discharge it with fidelity. Our concern, however, for the conversion and salvation of our children and families should be that God may be honoured by them, like Job's offering for his sons, lest they had sinned against the Lord: ch. i. 5.

5. In praying for *ourselves*, we must seek salvation in the same way. Our only plea must be the sufferings and death of Christ, and that not merely that we may escape destruction, but that God may be glorified.

In seeking consolation and support, it must be that we may serve the Lord with more acceptance: and in praying for persevering grace, our plea should be founded on what God has already done for us, and that he would not forsake the work of his own hands. Psal. cxxxviii. 8. 2 Cor. v. 5. Phil. i. 6.

HAPPY STATE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

Great grace was upon them all.—Acts iv. 33.

The power and the glory of the gospel may be seen in looking back on the times of the apostles: and such and more abundantly will be its glory in the latter day. It is peculiarly interesting to behold such a number brought to repentance, by such weak instruments too, and after the cause of Christ had been loaded with reproach by the crucifixion. Oh what a change and what a scene.

It is difficult to give the precise meaning of the text, or to know by what words to express it. We may form some idea of it by what we have now and then seen in some very eminent christians, and perhaps it is better judged of by comparison than in any other way. If great grace be seen in a minister, it makes his face to shine like that of Moses; or if in a private christian it makes him appear lovely, like one adorned in all the beauties of holiness.

We shall now seek an illustration of the text, by enquiring wherein such eminent grace appeared in these primitive believers.

Oh that by looking back on their conduct, we may be led to mourn over our great deficiency, and see from whence we are fallen, and repent.

1. Great grace appeared in their *earnest and united supplications*.

They had much communion with God in prayer, and this holy exercise was with them habitual. Acts i. 14. On any extraordinary occasion, if they were in trouble or suffered persecution, prayer was their first and last resort: ch. iv. 31.

When Peter was in prison, prayer was made for him by the whole church, ch. xii. 5: and when Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi, they spent the night in prayer: ch. xvi. 25.

When these primitive christians parted from each other they prayed together, though it was on the sea shore: ch. xxi. 5. They were also much devoted to private prayer, ch. x. 9: and great grace will lead to much intercourse with heaven.

2. It appeared in their *stedfast adherence to the apostle's doctrine*.

Great grace will prepare our hearts to understand the word, for it is that unction which teacheth all things; that which forms and adapts the mind to every part of the gospel.

Indifference to divine truth is always a sign of little grace, or of the total want of it; and it becomes us seriously to enquire whether our hearts are prepared for all we meet with in the apostles' doctrine.

A stedfast continuance in the truth is also a trial of grace. Not a continuance, indeed, in our own belief, because it is our own; for that may be where there is no grace; but to enter into the spirit of the apostles' doctrine, and to abide in it from love.

3. In a constant adherence to the *worship and service of God*. Acts

ii. 42, 46. Real religion was the object of supreme regard, and serving the Lord was their proper element: ch. iv. 46. All hands found some employment.

Peter and Paul viewed the whole world as lying before them, and they longed to go forth in the warfare: and wherever they went they made the service of Christ their proper business, whether on shipboard or in prison.

The History or Acts of the Apostles is full of their labours and travels for Christ; and churches were planted by them in almost every place. Ch. xiii. xiv.

4. In their great *love one to another*. They were all of one heart and one soul: ch. iv. 32. They had all things common, neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own.

This practice, however, continued only for a short time, during a special season of necessity. There were afterwards both rich and poor among them, but still they were of one heart.

Previous to their receiving the gospel they were at enmity with each other, and divided into sects and parties; but now all this was forgotten. Oh how interesting to see what religion can do!

5. These primitive christians were *full of holy joy* and peace in believing, and they triumphed in every place: ch. ii. 46.

Now was that prophecy fulfilled: 'Behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.' Samaria also was made glad with the tidings of salvation: ch. viii. 8.

They had found the Messiah, had obtained mercy, and now they rejoice in serving him.

6. Their *spirit and deportment* were such as recommended their religion to the world: ch. ii. 47.

They abounded in those christian graces which are lovely even in the eyes of men in general. They were neither surly nor morose, but pitiful, kind and courteous; easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Their conversation was such as becometh the gospel, and they adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

What reason have we to mourn, that we so little resemble these holy men.

Oh how far do we come short of their ardent zeal, their love to Christ and the souls of men.

Yet let us be thankful for a little of that spirit which appeared so eminently in them.

Bless God for the gospel, for the way of salvation, for the ordinances of Christ, for brotherly love and christian fellowship. Lord, increase our faith.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession : for we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.—Hebrews iv. 14—16.

The most important part of religion consists in the great doctrines contained in the gospel : these are the pillars which support the whole fabric of christianity, the great principles which animate and keep alive the whole system of practical and experimental piety. If these be undermined, the building falls ; or if lightly esteemed, the power of religion will decline. And of all the doctrines of the gospel, those are the most interesting and important which relate to the person and work of Christ ; for he is the sum and substance of the whole.

The text contains two of the most prominent characteristics of the High Priest of our profession ; namely, his dignity, and his sympathy. It also proposes two important duties, as arising out of them ; these are, a firm adherence to the gospel, and a free and frequent approach to the throne of grace.

I. Offer a few general remarks on the Priesthood of Christ.

1. The *character* and work of a high priest is given in Heb. v. 1. where three things are particularly noticed. First, he was “ordained” of God : he did not take the office upon himself, but was called to it by the command of God : ver. 4. Next, he was ordained “for men ;” for their service and advantage, and was to minister in the temple as their public representative. Lastly, his office was altogether spiritual, being connected with “things pertaining to God.” In things pertaining to men we may use the interest of each other ; but in approaching to God it must be only in the name of our great High Priest, and at all times we are to ‘come unto God by him.’

3. Things pertaining to *the office* of a high priest were principally two ; *oblation* and *intercession*. With regard to oblation, or the offering up of sacrifice, with prayers for the people, the offering was to be presented without the temple or the camp, and the intercession founded upon it was to be made in the holy place, within the veil. Lev. xv. 11—15. Thus Christ also suffered ‘without the gate’ of Jerusalem, Heb. xiii. 12 : and then entered within the veil to make intercession for us : ch. ix. 12. Hence he is become our propitiation, and our advocate with the Father. 1 John ii. 1.

3. It is under *the last of these characters* that Christ is represented to us in the text, as “a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens” for us. This indeed is an essential part of his sacerdotal office, without which he could not be a priest, ch. xiii. 4.

II. Notice the infinite dignity and tender sympathy united in his character: "for we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

This union of dignity and compassion is highly interesting and important. The Scriptures love to notice this peculiar trait in the Redeemer's character, and so should we. Hence we find him described as the mighty God, and yet as the child born, and the Son given:—as the Lord God, coming with a strong hand and a mighty arm, and yet as feeding his flock like a shepherd, gathering the lambs with his arm, and carrying them in his bosom:—also as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Isai. ix. 6. xl. 10, 11. Rev. v. 5, 6.

There are two things in particular which constitute the dignity and greatness of our high priest, namely, his being "the Son of God," and his having "passed into the heavens" for us. The one is expressive of the infinite dignity of his nature, and the other of the honour and advantage conferred by his ascension, and sitting at the right hand of God.

1. He is *the Son of God*. This is an expression which denotes his being of the same nature with God, or that God is his real and proper Father. John v. 18. Rom. viii. 32. Some have supposed that the Sonship of Christ arises from his incarnation, or his being manifest in the flesh, and sent into the world, or from the union of the divine and human nature in him. But it is evident that Christ is called the Son of God in reference to his divine nature, and that antecedently to his taking upon him our nature. Hence it is said, 'the Son of God was manifested,' that he might destroy the works of the devil. 'God sent forth his Son,' made of a woman, made under the law. 1 John iii. 8. Gal. iv. 4. He must therefore have been the Son of God before he was manifested in the flesh, or made of a woman, as well as before he was made under the law. His being called in the text, the Son of God, is evidently an intimation of his real and proper divinity; and this it is that makes him "a great high priest;" that gives worth and efficacy to his sacrifice, and weight to his mediation. Heb. i. 3.

2. Another part of his dignity and greatness arises from *the station he occupies*, in having "passed into the heavens." He is now before the throne of God, ever living to make intercession, and plead the efficacy of his sacrifice on our behalf: and hence he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him: ch. vii. 25. He has great interest with God; for him the Father heareth always. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Israel had power with God, and prevailed; he also ruled among the saints. But Christ hath power over all things, power over all flesh, and all power in heaven and on earth.

3. With all this power and greatness are blended *the tenderest sympathy and compassion*, and he whose eyes are as flames of fire is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." This wonderful combination of attributes arises from the union of the two natures in the

person of Christ, ch. ii. 15—16: and such unparalleled condescension ought forever to endear him to our hearts. He went through all our temptations, with only this difference—and well is it for us that such a difference did exist—he was “without sin.” The influence which this experience had on his compassion, appears from the prayer which he taught his disciples: ‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ Also from his own prayer, which he offered on their behalf: ‘Holy Father, keep through thy name those whom thou hast given me. These are in the world, but I am not in the world.’ And there is reason to believe that his sympathy and compassion operate in the same way now that he is in heaven, where he still remembers the infirmities, temptations, and trials of his people, and is ever pleading for their safety and deliverance.

III. The practical uses drawn from these interesting truths: “Let us therefore hold fast our profession, and come boldly to the throne of grace.”

1. Christianity is here called *a profession*. It is that which we have solemnly and openly avowed, if we are christians. 1 Tim. vi. 12. Heb. iii. 1. x. 23. It is our proper calling, the business of our whole life. 1 Cor. vi. 20. 2 Cor. viii. 5.

2. This profession we are required *to hold fast*, which is the same thing as being firmly attached to the gospel, or rooted and grounded in love. And surely if any thing can furnish a motive for this, it is the character of the great Author and object of our faith.

Where shall we find such another gospel, and such a Saviour? Lord, to whom should we go: thou hast the words of eternal life. John vi. 67.

To forsake Christ, is to forsake the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns.

What could we do without him? We could have no access to God, nor acceptance in his sight. John xiv. 6.

To give up Christ and the gospel would of all things be the most dreadful. It were better to make shipwreck of health, of property, of friends, and even of life itself, rather than of faith and of a good conscience. Beware then of men and of principles that would drive us hence.

Besides, how could we answer Christ another day! All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

3. There is *another duty*, or rather privilege, consequent on the doctrine maintained in the text: and that is, to “come boldly to a throne of grace.”

We stand in need of “mercy” to pardon, to cleanse, to uphold, and save us.

We also require “grace to help us in every time of need.”

In order to obtain all this “mercy,” there is “a throne of grace.” And what is best of all, Jesus is there to plead our cause and to present our supplications. Let us therefore come in his name

come “boldly,” with holy confidence, saying with Jacob, I will not let thee go except thou bless me.

PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED NOT TO BE ENVIED.

Let not thy heart envy sinners, but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long : for surely there is an end, and thine expectation shall not be cut off.—Proverbs xxiii. 17, 18.

The Proverbs of Solomon are full of wisdom, not merely of human wisdom, but of that which cometh from above. They contain it is true many maxims of human prudence, but they chiefly relate to something beyond the present life.

The passage before us contains a caution—a counsel—and the reasons on which both are founded.

I. Consider the caution : “Let not thy heart envy sinners.”

Sinners, though they are such, are too commonly the objects of envy, and that chiefly on three accounts—the favour which they generally receive from men—the prosperity conferred on them by Providence—and the ease with which they appear to go through the world.

1. Sinners will often obtain *the favour of men*, while the righteous obtain none. The world loves its own ; and if men are but civil and courteous one towards another, they will generally make their way to places of honour and profit much sooner than those who are the subjects of genuine religion. There are indeed many public stations in society which a good man could not conscientiously occupy ; or if it were otherwise, he could not employ those means which are commonly used in order to obtain them.

This was the case with Moses : he might have had the highest place in the court of Egypt, had he been disposed to relinquish his religion : but the favour of God was of infinitely greater consequence to him, than that of the most powerful monarch upon earth.

Men who have no such scruples can go on and prosper, and think it strange that others should be ‘over much righteous.’ They themselves rise into notice, and are presently envied for their success : but let us remember the caution given us in the text.

2. Sinners are often *prospered even of God himself*, while the righteous are left to struggle with hardships and difficulties.

It is common for men of the world to gain their object, while if a good man turn aside, God will contend with him. ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities.’

Even those who pursue wicked devices, and oppress others, are suffered to go on and prosper. Many have invaded the rights of mankind, and yet have been suffered to hold them ; have waded through blood to a throne, and yet are permitted to sway the sceptre ; have increased their riches by oppressing the poor, while the poor and oppressed themselves are ready to envy them.

Yet after all, their situation is not to be coveted : it is better to sustain than to inflict an injury, to suffer wrong than to do it.

Some indeed are seen to enjoy prosperity, without employing any dishonourable means to obtain

it: yet neither should these be the object of envy. The rich man in the gospel, whose ground brought forth plentifully, was not accused of any injustice, yet he had no portion beyond the present life: and how then can we envy the condition of such a man as this! Ps. xvii. 14, 15.

3. The ungodly pass through life with much apparent *ease and comfort*, and hence they are envied. Those who are restrained by

a religious education, and who cannot therefore sin so easily as others, are often tempted to think the prosperous state of the wicked to be desirable.

Many also have similar feelings, under the first convictions of sin, and when they think of turning their feet to God's testimonies.

But let such remember, that if the way of the wicked appear to be ever so easy, it may be so only in appearance, while the inward pangs are carefully concealed. Or, were it otherwise, it is only like the ox going to the slaughter.

II. Attend to the counsel given: "But be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long."

"The fear of the Lord" is only another term for true religion. Not that it consists in an habitual dread of the great Supreme, but in having a regard to him and to his will in all other ways; fearing to offend or dishonour him, and cherishing a filial disposition towards him as the object of our reverence and love.

This is the best antidote against a spirit of envy, and will yield contentment and satisfaction when nothing else will. If destitute of this holy and heavenly disposition, you may perhaps be induced to say, I cannot alter things: I will therefore make myself easy, and get as much of the world as I can, hoping it may be my turn sometime or other to be rich and prosperous too. Nay but all these are only idle dreams: "Be thou in the fear of the Lord."

Take the will of God for your rule; and if you cannot keep pace with the world, be content to go behind.

Decline the case of worldly dissipation: let them run who will, and let them win the prize: envy them not.

Indeed, if you fear God, you must go behind in many things. That sacred principle will not suffer you to give up your soul to the world, nor allow the interests of religion to be neglected.

If in the fear of the Lord "all the day long," it will be a powerful preservative against every temptation: it will keep you watchful, prayerful, contented, peaceable, and happy.

III. The reason on which the caution and the counsel are both founded: "For surely there is an end, and thine expectation shall not be cut off."

The first of these sentences seems to refer to "sinners," and the last to such as are in the "fear of the Lord."

1. "There is an end." This idea relieved Asaph, when he was tempted to envy the prosperity of the wicked. Psal. lxxiii. 17. Hence also we are cautioned not to be envious against the workers of iniquity. Psal. xxxvii. 1, 2. The time will come when the favour of

the world will be unavailing when, earthly prosperity will turn to greater condemnation, and former ease to aggravated misery. Luke xvi. 25.

Another part of the evil is the uncertainty when this end shall come. The wicked are 'set in slippery places,' and their fall is often sudden and unexpected.

Go and see the sinner at death, and whether you would then envy his situation. Behold him at the judgment seat, and learn what little cause there is for a christian to repine.

2. There is an "expectation" in them that fear God, and "it shall not be cut off."

The expectation of the humble is often disappointed in the present life, but it shall not perish for ever, nor be as the giving up the ghost.

But may we not envy the lot of some who are both good and great, and who seem to have both worlds for their portion?

The answer is, that charity envieth not, but rejoiceth where the bounties of nature and of providence are wisely and well applied: and if not so applied, even the condition of rich and good men is not to be desired. There are but few rich men, if they be good men upon the whole, but what have great leanness of soul in the midst of their abundance.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AGED PIETY.

There went with us also certain of the disciples of Cæsarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cypress, an old disciple.—Acts xxi. 16.

It is most probable that this distinguished individual was among the first fruits of the gospel, and that he was a follower of our Lord's person, as he still retained the original appellation of a "disciple." Anxious for the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, he had retired to Cyprus to make a first effort to evangelize that dark and desolate island, where he lived to an advanced age, and was known as an old disciple.

I. Notice some of the leading features in the character described in the text.

Believers in Christ were called disciples, to denote that they were his followers; but there are many who called themselves christians that neither learn of him, nor imitate his example.

1. An old disciple is one who has been long learning in the school of Christ, and therefore may be expected to have made considerable progress in the divine life.

Those who are of 'full age' have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Their knowledge of God is enlarged, their experience is enriched, and their judgment matured.

We do not expect to find in an old disciple all that vivacity

and activity which appears in young converts, but there is a solidity of character and deportment which stamps an honour and a dignity on the christian profession.

In young converts there is a love and zeal which is amiable in the eyes of the aged, and which, like the blossoms in the spring, presents a beauty and sheds a fragrance more delightful to the traveller, than the matured fruits of autumn; yet to a reflecting mind, the solid advantages of the latter would be more highly esteemed.

2. We may expect in an old disciple a more fixed and rooted faith in the high and sublime mysteries of the gospel, especially if such a one has continued in the christian profession unshaken by the storms of temptation.

Having derived courage from former achievements, and a long series of opposition, he is grown bold in the fight, and hardy in the warfare. Fixed on the rock of ages, he is not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel.

3. We expect to see in an old disciple a greater simplicity of dependence upon Christ for salvation.

Young converts are frequently distressed on account of the reverses in their frames and feelings; but in proportion as they make advances in religion, they see a precariousness of their spiritual condition and devotional sympathies, and look with a more entire dependence on the Saviour. They derive their comforts more immediately from objects out of themselves, and their consolations are of course more steady and permanent.

To the young christian the sun of consolation is frequently eclipsed, by those clouds of darkness which arise from the infirmities of human nature, and which he is unable to penetrate; but the aged veteran having conquered hosts of corruption, and being able to distinguish between the depravity and the involuntary weaknesses of his nature, is not so easily dismayed; and though his religious frames may vary, he holds at all times the language of Paul, 'I know in whom I have believed, that he is able to keep what I have committed unto him against that day.' It is no new thing with him to repair to the Saviour: he has done it many times before, and is assured of his ability and willingness to save. Matt. xxvi. 41. Rom. vii. 20. 2 Tim. i. 12.

4. We expect to see an old disciple weaned from the present world, in proportion as his interests decline and recede with his growing years.

He has long ago detected the fallacy of all its hopes and promises; his palate has lost its taste, and his eye is become dim with its glare. Not only are his faculties enfeebled and unfitted for the pursuit, but the world is crucified to him, and he is crucified to the world, by the cross of Christ. He has followed, it may be, to the gloomy sepulchre all that was dear to him on earth, and he is left solitary in his habitation. Amidst these bereavements his affections are set on things above, and his thoughts more habitually directed to the unseen world, where all his treasure is, and all his hopes terminate. Whence also he is looking for the Saviour, even Jesus who delivered him from the wrath to come.

5. In an old disciple we expect a greater degree of candour than is ordinarily exercised, in judging of the character and failings of others. Such may be supposed indeed to have their predilections, and that their

attachments to early connections will run high ; yet they will cordially esteem and love all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, of whatever name or denomination ; and in viewing the more prominent features of christianity, will at the moment lose sight of the little peculiarities, by which their own denomination is distinguished, and feel their hearts absorbed in love. Young christians are generally tenacious, and sometimes fierce, for the minor parts of their own system, and know not how to exercise a becoming forbearance towards those who differ from them ; but it is one of the excellencies of an aged saint, that he knows how to estimate the relative importance of things, without being perpetually employed in tithing mint and anise and cummin. In proportion as a believer advances in the divine life his spiritual discernment becomes clear, he forms a more impartial estimate of character, and being purified by the love of Christ, his affections are melted into kindness and gentleness and love.

6. Patience may be expected to form a principal part of the character of an old disciple. After having spent a long life of vicissitude and trial, after being inured to injuries and hardships, and guided through a protracted pilgrimage by the hand of God ; after witnessing so many interpositions of providence, and experiencing the power of God to save in seasons of the utmost extremity ; it may be expected that, in an old disciple, patience has had its perfect work, so that he is perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Christians who have had but few trials, and so have seen but little of the power and faithfulness of God are often impatient under suffering ; but it is not so with the aged and experienced saint. Rom. v. 3—5.

II. Offer a few remarks deducible from the subject.

1. The very fact of Mnason being an “old disciple,” gives a degree of credit to the christian religion, and affords proof of its reality and importance. Had it been a system of imposture, it might have had its disciples indeed, like some others of a recent date, which have not failed to seduce the unwary ; but it would have had no “old” disciple. The imposture would have been detected and abandoned ; but it is the glory of christianity that its evidences are more deeply felt, and its importance more fully realised, as we draw nearer to an eternal world.

2. The exercise of an old disciple, affords proof of the reality of vital godliness, while it sheds a lustre upon the profession of the gospel.

When the disciple is told on his first approach to the Saviour, that he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him ; when he is told that he must encounter a host of enemies, must maintain a perpetual warfare, relinquish the world, and abstain from fleshly lusts : how would he find sufficient fortitude to sustain him, if he had no spiritual resources, no treasure in heaven, and no communion with the Saviour.

His perseverance in faith, in hope, in love, in universal obedience, amidst such a host of difficulties and trials, shows his religion to be divine.

3. An old disciple is a character full of dignity and honour. In the esteem of the wisest of men, ‘the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it

be found in the way of righteousness;’ and amongst the most polished nations, peculiar respect has always been paid to old age. History makes mention of a greyheaded old man entering an assembly of philosophers at Athens, at the time they were delivering encomiums on the excellence of virtue, and they suffered him to stand during the whole time. He afterwards went into the company of some Lacedemonians, who instantly paid respect to his age by offering him a superior seat in their assembly. The old man afterwards remarked, that the Athenians talked about virtue, and the Lacedemonians practised it. But

with how much greater propriety do we pay our respects to aged piety, and give honour to those who have honoured Christ. The aged saint, who like the skilful mariner has conducted his vessel through a long and perilous voyage, without making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, is entitled to double honour, both for the success of his enterprise, and the rich and valuable cargo which he has brought from far.

4. An old disciple is entitled to affectionate congratulations, as well as to our reverence and esteem. In the language of the prophet we may speak comfortably to such, and say that their warfare is accomplished, and their iniquity is pardoned. Standing on the confines of the grave, they seem to have little or no connection with the present world; the first breeze of affliction is sufficient to snap the tender bough, so richly laden with immortal fruit, and to lay it low in the dust. The memory of such persons is blessed, and ought to be embalmed in the memorials of the christian church, for in them we see the happiest monuments of the power and grace of God.

5. Let the example and experience of aged saints afford encouragement to all who have set out in the spiritual pilgrimage. We have the same grace to uphold us, the same Spirit for our guide and instructor; and there is not a single instance of failure presented in the whole gospel, of such as have unreservedly committed themselves to the care of the great shepherd and bishop of souls. He presents us with specimens of his power and grace in the protracted age of some of his disciples, that we may not be weary and faint in our minds, but become followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

6. If we wish to see the excellency of true religion, let us compare the end of an old disciple with that of the aged sinner. Both are laden with fruit, both are ripe for the sickle, both are on the verge of eternity: but oh how amazing the difference. The venerable disciple obeys the dictates of immortality, and presses forward to eternal life; while the aged sinner is dragged from his tottering tabernacle, calling upon the rocks and mountains to hide him from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. The one is looking forward to an eternity of uninterrupted bliss; the other has nothing before him but a gulf of blackness and darkness, and endless despair.

Who then can contemplate the state of these opposite characters, without feeling himself deeply interested in the issue. Every individual must finally share the portion of the one or the other; and who then would not flee from the congregation of the dying and the dead, to join himself with the living in Jerusalem. You may die soon: there is no accident so trivial but it may be sufficient to dissipate your breath.

The avenues of life are so subtil, the tenure on which we hold it so precarious, that we know not but death has even now aimed the blow.

To wish for happiness without seeking it in the way of holiness, is the paradise of fools. You must therefore come to the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, must have your conscience sprinkled with the atoning blood of Christ, and your souls renewed by his sanctifying grace.

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF PRIDE.

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by faith—Habakkuk ii. 4.

The prophet Habakkuk, who probably lived in the reign of Hezekiah, takes a rapid survey of the state and character of the Chaldeans; and the text seems to refer more immediately to their king, who was so confident of success in the siege of Jerusalem, that his heart was lifted up with pride and ostentation, and a presumptuous confidence in human resources, though upon that occasion his schemes were blasted in a night, and his armies discomfited and scattered.

While denouncing many woes against this species of conduct, the prophet addresses various consolatory reflections to the people of Israel, recommending patience under all their sufferings, and faith in the promised deliverance. 'The vision' might appear to 'tarry' beyond the appointed time, and their faith and patience might be greatly tried; but the prophecy should be fulfilled, and the day of salvation would surely come.

The text, however, contains a general truth, applicable at all times, and under all circumstances. Self-confidence and trust in God are directly opposed to each other, and the one or the other of these principles governs the conduct of all mankind. The characteristic difference between the righteous and the wicked, or between the just and the unjust is, that the former "live by faith," while the latter are "lifted up" with pride and vanity.

In order to illustrate the important distinction indicated in the text, we shall briefly notice some of the leading features of the character that is here condemned.

1. Those are not upright before God, who are elated with temporal prosperity. Such persons generally ascribe their success to their own merit, or superior skill. Their language is secretly, 'My might and my wisdom have gotten me this wealth.' These sentiments induce a forgetfulness of God, foster a worldly spirit, generate carnal affections, unholy and unjust desires. Pride has ever been one of the principal snares to entrap unwary souls, and it is generally seen

that 'pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.' Nebuchadnezzar is set forth as a monument of this truth, for at the very moment when his soul was lifted up, saying, 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty; there fell a voice from heaven, saying, 'the kingdom is departed from thee.' Too much of this same spirit is to be found in all the ordinary walks of life: pride has so many gradations, and exists in so many forms, that it connects itself with the humblest fortune, dwells in the deepest obscurity, and pervades every human breast. Yet what folly and infatuation is it to be elated with temporal prosperity, when we recollect the precariousness and uncertainty of all sublunary possessions, the utter insignificance of man, and the contraction of his power, compared with the majesty and power of God. It becomes us also to remember that we are subject to death, that destroyer of all distinctions, that leveller of human nature, which lays the prince and the beggar equally low in the dust.

The true tendency and design of the bounties of providence is to humble the children of men, to bow them down with a load of benefits, like the branches of a tree richly laden with fruit. In proportion as true religion prevails in the heart, this will be the effect: the goodness of God will lead us to repentance, and lay us low in the dust before him. So much danger, however, attends worldly prosperity, that it is the bane and the ruin of many professors of religion, and furnishes occasion in almost every instance for the most serious apprehension and admonition. Deut. xxxi. 20. xxxii. 15.

2. His soul is lifted up, and not upright in him, who places confidence in the success of his own schemes. Many who are not prosperous in the world, are nevertheless implicated in this charge. They imagine that they see the causes of their former miscarriage, and hope to repair the breach by some well-directed effort. In the pride and stoutness of their heart they say with the children of Israel, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. They alter their plans, and vary their pursuits, hoping to repair their fortunes by human resources, without dependence on the Lord.

It is against this spirit that the prophet Habakkuk denounces so many woes, in the verses following the text, and charges the people of Israel with the grossest idolatry and superstition. All reliance on human wisdom and ability is an implied contempt of God, a transfer of his perfections to the creature, and a rejection of him who is the root and centre of all dependence.

3. Those who rely on their own understanding in the affairs of religion, are included in the charge exhibited by the prophet: their soul is lifted up, and is not upright in them.

Revelation supposes our ignorance of that which is revealed, and also the utter insufficiency of reason to explore the depths of revelation itself. Had reason been sufficient to guide us in the path of life, revelation would be given in vain; but we are taught to renounce our own wisdom, to receive with implicit submission the divine testimony, and to commit ourselves unreservedly to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is true we cannot ascertain the

meaning of Scripture but by the exercise of reason, but to reject the testimony of God because he has revealed more than we can comprehend, is the height of profaneness and absurdity. As well might we object to what God has done, as to what he has said, seeing that all his works and ways are unsearchable.

The pride of intellect must be abased, we must become fools in order to be made wise, or we shall know nothing as we ought to know. God alone can impart wisdom, and it is one of the first elements of the christian religion, that we receive with implicit confidence the record which God hath given of his Son. John iii. 36. 1 John v. 9—11.

4. All who indulge a self-righteous spirit are implicated in this charge: their soul also is most fatally lifted up, and is not upright in them. The word of God represents men as poor, and impotent, and blind: but how can such characters be supposed to give credit to the divine declaration, who imagine themselves to be rich, and have need of nothing. How can they trust in the Saviour for pardon and acceptance, who have nothing to deplore. Those that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Christ will accept of no divided confidence; he is the way, and there is no other. Self must be renounced and annihilated, or no true dependence can be placed on him.

Also in detracting from his dignity, or from the necessity and importance of his mediation, the sinner's heart is lifted up with the vain conceit that he does not need so great a Saviour, and that his case is not so helpless nor so hopeless as the Scriptures represent; his soul therefore is not upright in him.

5. Those who are inflated with spiritual pride, or who value themselves on their superior gifts and religious attainments, are included in the same condemnation.

This kind of pride is more subtil in its operations, more specious and incurable than any other. Some of its effects may be seen in the Corinthian church, which was enriched with gifts from above, that others might be fed and nourished by them; instead of which they were turned into nutriment to feed their own vanity. One said, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos. Instead of tolerating their brethren, they sat in judgment to condemn; instead of mourning over the decline of their graces, they gloried in their gifts, and were vainly puffed up with their fleshly mind.

Religion in its various forms is disfigured and debased by this deteriorating principle. In some there is the pride of orthodoxy, in others the pride of experience and of spirituality: and if we glory in any of these we boast of a false fulness.

Pure religion is of too refined and elevated a nature to incorporate with the leaven of pride; and in proportion as we make real advances in the divine life, we shall be assimilated to the likeness of Christ, who was humility itself personified.

Though the above remarks are intended to show the evil nature and deformity of pride, there are yet other considerations which should make us dread its empire over the heart.

(1) The indulgence of pride affords proof of a practical forgetfulness of God.

Every manifestation of the divine glory has a tendency

to abase the sinner, and to lay him low in the dust. It is impossible to contemplate the character of God without being oppressed with awe, or without feeling our nothingness, and loathing ourselves before him.

At what an immeasurable distance then from God must that soul be living, and how unmindful of his all-pervading presence, who can be lifted up with pride and vanity, at the transient view of some imaginary good.

(2) The indulgence of this spirit shows a deep forgetfulness of ourselves, and of the awful corruption of our nature. What sinners must we be, for whose sake the earth is cursed, and all the elements of nature disturbed. Sinners who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, bound with the fetters of ignorance and sin. Can there be any thing in such a state to inspire pride. Is there not enough to humble us in the dust, and to overwhelm us with shame and confusion?

(3) This disposition of mind is directly opposed to the spirit and genius of the gospel, and of course utterly inconsistent with the character of its professors. The first effort of the gospel is to put down the mighty from their seats, and to scatter the proud in the imaginations of their heart; to cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exaleth itself against the knowledge of God. The gospel is good news to the poor, light to the blind, and healing to the diseased. It empties of self and sin, in order to make room for the Saviour, and for the communication of all spiritual blessings in him. How then can this consist with the spirit so justly reprobated by the prophet.

It is the peculiar character of the "just," that he "lives by faith." His is a life of holy and humble dependence upon God, in opposition to that of the self-righteous and self-confident. Faith is the principle that animates all his exertions, that keeps him from sinking in the midst of adversity, and that bears him forward to immortality.

ADOPTING GRACE AND LOVE.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.—1 John iii. 1.

It was the leading design of the writer of this epistle, to display the exceeding riches of the grace of God in the gospel, and hence he speaks so often and so fully of the love of God, and in a style of majestic simplicity peculiar to the apostle John. He well knew that this subject was the source of all holiness, and of all happiness to us as sinners, and therefore he enlarges upon it with such ineffable delight. The law prescribes the rule of conduct, but it is the gospel that furnishes the

most powerful motives to obedience, and this it is that fills us with all the fulness of God.

With the view of promoting our conformity to the divine likeness, let us meditate on the sublime expressions in the text: and—

I. Consider the blessing itself: our being made or “called the sons of God.”

In what sense are sinners made such, and what is included in this wonderful relation.

1. Our being called the sons of God must be distinguished from *the relation we bear to him as our Creator*. God is the common Father of angels and men. The former are called sons of God, and are described as shouting for joy at the creation of the world. Job xxxviii. 7. Adam also, as the immediate production of his Creator, is called the son of God. Luke iii. 38.

But the relation we bear to God as his children as by adoption, and not by nature, for as such we are children of wrath. Ephes. ii. 3.

How then can God be said to adopt his own creatures, his own offspring? This leads us to a very humbling truth; that by sin we have rendered ourselves utterly unworthy of that character, and are become strangers and enemies by wicked works. We ceased to bear the image of God, and are become by sin the children of the wicked one; so much so, that God's regard to us as creatures gave way to his displeasure against us as sinners. ‘He that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour.’ Isai. xxvii. 11.

For God therefore to treat us now as children, requires to be by a new covenant, or an economy of grace founded on the mediation of Christ, and so adopting us as aliens and strangers, and gathering in the outcasts.

2. The privilege of adoption is represented as having been provided *before the world began*, but actually conferred upon us when we believe in Jesus. Ephes. i. 4—6.

We become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus: and to as many as receive him, he gives power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. Gal. iii. 26. John i. 12.

3. Though this blessing is not confined to any particular period, yet it *chiefly belongs to the present dispensation*.

Adoption into the family of God is one of those sublime and important truths which are more fully revealed and brought to light by the gospel. We were never directed till then to say, ‘Our Father.’

Old-testament saints enjoyed the privilege of a national adoption, and to them pertained the covenants, and the giving of the law: but they were still subject to a spirit of bondage. Rom. ix. 4. The veil was not rent till Jesus expired on the cross, nor the way into the holiest of all made plain. The spirit of the gospel is called a spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Ezek. xvi. 1—6. Gal. iv. 4—6.

II. The great love expressed in the bestowment of this blessing.

It is introduced by the apostle as something that was beyond description, and that filled him with admiration.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!”

1. It is represented as a blessing freely *bestowed* upon us, and not what might have been naturally expected, in the ordinary course of things.

The love of a father to a son is perfectly natural, and arises out of the relation subsisting between them. But this is of mere grace and sovereign mercy. Jer. iii. 19.

2. It is supposed to be *inexpressible and inconceivable*: "behold, what manner of love."

It is like the love of God in the gift of his Son, of which it is said, he *so* loved the world. John iii. 16.

It is like the love of Christ in dying for his enemies, it has no parallel. Rom. v. 7, 8.

Herein indeed is love, and that love that cannot be expressed. Ephes. iii. 18, 19. 1 John iii. 16. iv. 9, 10.

3. It is intimated that *the kind of love* herein manifested, infinitely surpasses all that has been seen or heard of amongst men.

We have known and heard of wonderful instances of love, but nothing that can compare with this. There have been remarkable attachments amongst friends. It is said of Jonathan that he loved David as his own soul: but this affection was founded in loveliness of character, and congeniality of disposition.

David's love to Absalom was very strong, as may be seen in his bitter lamentation over him: 'Would to God that I had died for thee!' This was an instance too where there was great unworthiness; but it was a love that was inefficient, it could only weep over his unhappy end.

How different from all this is the love of God to us as sinners!

The following considerations will tend a little to illustrate the unexampled love of God towards us—

(1) The *odiousness* of our character as sinners. The description given of the outcast, by the prophet, is highly figurative of our state. Ezek. xvi. That indeed is a description of misery only but ours is a state both of sin and misery: for when in our blood, he said unto us 'live.'

Our state was such by nature as to render it almost impossible to put us among the children, and it might well be said, How shall I do it! Jer. iii. 19.

(2) The *medium* through which our adoption is accomplished.

It is 'by Christ Jesus;' by his assumption of our nature, becoming himself the Son of man, and laying down his life for us. Ephes. i. 5. Gal. iv. 4, 5. Behold, what manner of love is this!

(3) The fulness of the love itself, in making and calling us the sons of God.

It is comprehensive of every other blessing: for if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Rom. viii. 17. It includes an interest in the divine affections, and all that is comprehended in the care and love of God. We are taught to believe, that as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; that he careth for them with parental solicitude, and taketh pleasure in the prosperity of his servants. When the world casts us off, and even father and mother forsake us, then the Lord will take us up. Yea, though Abraham should be ignorant of us, yet doubtless he is still our Father, and nothing can alienate his love.

The blessing of adoption gives us free access to God at all times, and we may come boldly to a throne of grace: he lends an indulgent ear to all our complaints.

Adoption gives us a place in his house and family, and enti-

bles us to all the privileges of children. It gives us part in the first resurrection an inheritance among all them that are sacrificed and a crown and a kingdom that fadeth not away.

IMPROVEMENT.

(1) Let us enquire then, to which family do we belong? If to the family of God, we must be separate from the world, and come into the closest bonds with one another. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

(2) If we partake of the privileges of adoption, let us be concerned to possess the spirit of it, that we may not enjoy those privileges in vain. Rom. viii. 14. Gal. iv. 6.

(3) Those who possess the hope of being the sons of God, are expected to purify themselves, even as he who hath loved them is pure. 1 John iii. 3.

(4) If God hath so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 1 John iv. 10, 11.

SIN AND DANGER OF DELAYING THE CONCERNS OF RELIGION.

Boast not thyself of to-morrow : for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.—Proverbs xxvii. 1.

In order to a proper understanding of the text, it is necessary to define and explain the nature of the evil it is intended to condemn; and to feel the force of the admonition, we must expose the folly and inconsistency of those principles which lead to the opposite conclusion.

I. Endeavour to ascertain the nature of the evil which the wise man condemns: "Boast not thyself of to-morrow."

There are some necessary calculations of human life, attended at the same time with so many contingencies as are quite sufficient to exclude "boasting," or even the confident expectation of future good.

1. To indulge the hope of its probable continuance another day, and to arrange our temporal concerns accordingly, cannot be wrong; for in ordinary cases it is a dictate of common prudence, and of common sense.

If the business of life is not to be pursued, from a reasonable expectation of its continuance, there would be a total suspension of labour, and one of the great ends of human existence would be defeated.

2. It cannot be improper to do that to-day, from a reasonable expectation of life, which we should be inclined to do to-morrow, were we certain of its continuance.

If a person sees it his duty to repent of sin, and to seek some preparation for eternity, it would become him

to do that to-day which he conceives would be his duty at some future time, as much so as if he were certain of not surviving the present hour.

We are neither to presume on another day, as an excuse for neglecting present duty ; nor to despair of life, in order to free us from its necessary interests and concerns.

3. The admonition is intended to guard us against a vain and presumptuous confidence of long life, or of the continuance of life, even for a single day ; a calculation by which multitudes have been and are still deceived.

This spirit is severely condemned by an apostle : 'Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain : whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.' Jam. iv. 13, 14. Yet we see men exulting in the thought of protracted life, taking for granted what is barely probable, forgetting their dependence upon God, and that life is even a vapour, that appeareth but for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

II. Consider the pernicious influence of that presumption which leads men to "boast of to-morrow," and to anticipate the long continuance of life.

1. It is this which prevents multitudes from making religion an object of immediate concern, and preparing for eternity. If the principles of christianity are just and true, and men are moral agents, shortly to give an account of their conduct, it is of the utmost importance duly to consider our state before God ; and he who fails to attend to this duty to-day, is presuming on what of all things is most uncertain, namely, the continuance of life, with all its present opportunities and advantages. But for a sinful creature, exposed every moment to eternal death and destruction, to risk his soul with all its present and future interests on such a dreadful uncertainty, is the height of folly and presumption.

2. He who lives under the dispensation of the gospel, and yet continues in the neglect of strenuous exertions to press into the kingdom of God, is presuming on to-morrow, and substituting a mere possibility for an absolute certainty, and stifling his conviction of the necessity of a present meetness for death. But let such remember, that the evil of remaining unprepared is not lessened or removed by neglecting to think of it, and that this criminal inattention has been the ruin of thousands of souls.

3. He who spends a single day without devoting some part of it to serious meditation and prayer, is acting on the presumption mentioned in the text ; and he also who neglects his Bible, or is not in the habit of mixing serious reflection with his daily occupation and pursuits. Such a person is sliding down a precipice, without being aware of his danger, or considering how soon he may be precipitated to the bottom.

4. If any one is living under the influence of an envious or malignant spirit, or cherishing an unforgiving temper towards others, he is presuming on the certainty of life ; for surely no man, if he expected to die to-morrow, would think of leaving the world in such a state of mind.

To suppose that a person dying in such a state could possibly be happy, would be to imagine Christ himself mistaken, when he solemnly declared such to be in danger of hell fire. Matt. v. 22. If in defiance of his authority you can cherish resentments, stimulate your passions, and blow up the flame of malice in your breast, you must be presuming on some future opportunity for reflection, and for relinquishing these sentiments and feelings. But if you should be mistaken, and God should send his messenger for you, where would you appear? With the unjust servant in outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Matt. xxiv. 49—51.

5. That person is boasting of to-morrow who lives in the neglect of any known duty, or in the practice of any known sin. This is to venture on the thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler, and to affront him to his face; it is heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. There are evils sufficiently numerous and aggravated to be accounted for, without the addition of presumptuous sins, which will awfully inflame the reckoning.

6. All who place their chief happiness in the things of the present life, and wish to make them their portion, are included in the number of such as are boasting of to-morrow: and if it be possible, and only possible, that we may live another day, how unspeakable is the infatuation of such conduct. A good man will be surprised that ever he should have loved the present world in the manner he has done when he comes to die, and when he views things in the light of eternity; but what will be the consternation of the wicked, when they find that they have bartered eternal life for a mere phantom, and deceived themselves into endless and irretrievable perdition.

III. Notice the guilt, as well as the danger, of neglecting our present duty and interest on the presumption that life may be prolonged.

1. This disposition originates in a deliberate aversion and total alienation of the heart from God. Every element seeks its kindred element; fire ascends to its source, and water flows to the ocean; but in the mind of man there is no congeniality with the fountain of all existence and of all intellectual blessedness, and no wish for any alliance or intercourse with the supreme good. Hence it is that spiritual duties are postponed and neglected, and spiritual interests abandoned and forgotten.

Good men would not live here always, they aspire after immortality and eternal life, and despise the trifles of time when put in competition with the substantial realities of eternity. What is it then that leads men to attach a permanency to the present world, but a supreme delight in its pursuits; and at the bottom of this is found a thick and impenetrable crust of earthly mindedness, and an aversion and enmity to God which nothing can subdue.

2. This state of mind implies a great contempt of the warnings which God has given us in his holy word. If there is any one truth more frequently urged upon our attention than another, it is the shortness of time, the vanity of life, that all flesh is grass, and all the godliness of man as the flower of the field. God sometimes speaks in the

whirlwind to arouse men from their security, by suddenly snatching away those who appeared least exposed to the stroke of death. All are aware of the unrelenting hand of this formidable enemy, that he affords no respite, takes no bribes, and admits of no discharge in this war. Every trophy of death is a re-echo of the momentous truth, and frequent scenes of mortality are passing before our eyes that we may be effectually taught the folly and danger of boasting of to-morrow. For this purpose also the divine Being is pleased to paint the gloom of the sepulchre afresh, to overshadow it with additional darkness, that those who have eyes and see not may be penetrated and awed. To live therefore in the neglect of religious duties and interests, amidst such solemn warnings and admonitions, implies an awful contempt of God and religion.

3. There is not only an extreme degree of sinfulness in delaying our repentance, on the presumption that space will be given for its exercise, but the utmost suspense and uncertainty will in all probability characterise the act.

Suppose God to effect your conversion, and give repentance on a dying bed: how could you expect to enjoy the full assurance of faith, or to be happy without it. If true religion be a character, and not merely a transient feeling or state of mind; is it not highly expedient that such a character should be formed in time of health? No man thinks of establishing his character in the world the last day he has to live: and is the formation of the christian character of less importance? Is it not rather of infinitely greater moment? A miracle of grace is to be performed, which no power could effect but that of God; and yet all is to be left to the mercy of the moment. Strange infatuation!

4. It is a still greater aggravation, that such conduct is a direct abuse of the goodness and mercy of God. Why are you spared, but because he delighteth in mercy. Not willing that any should perish, he has granted space for repentance: and is it not then of the utmost importance that this reprieve should be wisely and well improved?

Say not that you are yet young, and have other concerns to engage your attention, and that you are now setting out in life. This is one grand reason why your mind should be first imbued and fortified with religious principles, that you may pass through life with honour and success. Acquaint thyself therefore with God, and be at peace. Abuse his mercy no longer, but seek him earnestly, and without delay. Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

CHRISTIAN COMPASSION.

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.—Hebrews xii. 12, 13.

The defection among the believing Hebrews seems to have arisen in part from the persecutions they met with on account of the gospel. They had been greatly oppressed by their unbelieving countrymen, and though they had not been called to resist unto blood, yet they had suffered 'the spoiling of their goods,' in the beginning of their profession. This at first they nobly endured, but afterwards fainted. Like their forefathers in the wilderness, when trouble overtook them, some of them were for going back, and others were disheartened.

The words of the text are taken from Isai. xxxv. 3, 4, and are addressed to the believing Hebrews as an admonition to comfort and encourage one another. The disheartened among them are compared to such as had been running in a race, or sustaining a protracted conflict till their knees began to tremble, and their hands to hang down; and in this condition, those who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak.

I. Notice the religious state of those who answer to the description given in the text.

Were we to compare christians in general of the present day with those of the first ages, it would appear that they are grown weak and faint. We have but little of the zeal and activity which characterised the primitive church. The duties of religion are but faintly regarded, our resistance of evil is irresolute and undecided, and our fortitude in trials and adversities bears but little comparison with theirs.

The description, however, is more particularly applicable to certain individual cases and characters amongst us, who need the compassion of their brethren, under their various difficulties and discouragements.

1. Some are ready to faint under difficulties and *troubles of a worldly nature*.

With all their toil, and care, and industry, though they rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, they are scarcely able to get along; and not casting all their care upon him who careth for them, the load becomes too heavy, and they sink beneath the burden.

Yet if we keep near to the Lord, such things may be endured. Some poor people are very happy amidst all their privations, while others are faint and weary in their course.

2. Some are discouraged through distrust, and *groundless fears of future ills*.

In addition to the troubles they already feel, they anticipate future ones which may never come. Thus David, in the former part of life, was rendered perpetually uneasy by the apprehension that he should one day perish by the hand of Saul.

But if we could leave the future with God we should be happy, and by encounter-

ing our difficulties only one at a time we should get through them all at last. Matt. vi. 34.

3. Others are distressed not only with the difficulties of life, but from being under *the chastening hand of God*. They could bear injustice and oppression from the hands of men; but when providence seems to be against them, they are utterly dismayed, and their strength is dried up. Flesh and heart fail them; and not finding sufficient relief in the promises, they faint in the day of adversity. These things may be borne, however if God be with us; but if left to ourselves, our hands will soon hang down, and our knees be feeble.

4. Some are disheartened by repeated opposition from *the enemies of religion*. Though the laws of our country do not now admit of open persecution, there is nevertheless a great deal of enmity, reproach and unkindness to be endured oftentimes from friends and near relations for the sake of truth and of a good conscience. This also may be borne, if we live near to God, and duly estimate the importance of christian principles; otherwise we shall soon grow weary and faint in our minds. It was well with these Hebrews while they were warmly attached to the gospel; but when they began to give that up, their strength failed them.

5. Some are greatly discouraged by *inward conflicts*, arising from the evil propensities of their own hearts. It is more difficult to sustain this warfare than all the troubles that assail us from without. David could meet his numerous enemies in the field, and was not afraid of ten thousands of his people who set themselves against him; but when compassed about with his own iniquities, his heart utterly failed him, and he was not able to look up. Psal. xl. 12. Some easily besetting sin, arising from constitution or peculiar circumstances in life, is sufficient to destroy the comfort of a believer, and almost to annihilate his hope. Whether it consists in an inordinate love of the world, or the indulgence of some sordid appetite, it interrupts communion with God, cuts off supplies of grace from above, and so weakens and relaxes all the energies of vital religion. The hands hang down, and the knees are feeble.

6. A *departure from evangelical truth* has weakened the strength of some by the way, and left them shorn of their dignity and glory.

The relinquishment of any of the leading doctrines of the gospel, or mixing them up with a portion of error, tends as certainly to enfeeble the christian graces, and to destroy the stimulus to holy activity, as the indulgence of sin itself. Gal. v. 7—9. If we begin to think less of the evil of sin, if we feel less our need of a divine Redeemer, and cease to go to God by him as lost and perishing sinners; if in this case we are christians at all, we shall soon grow faint and feeble, and exhibit little more than the mere form of godliness.

7. The despondency of some good people arises no doubt from a natural *gloominess in their constitution*, which disposes them to dwell on the dark side of every subject, rather than on the other. They think of their own unworthiness, and forget the worthiness of the Saviour. They are overtaken by some temptation, fall into sin, and forget that there is an Advocate with the Father. 1 John ii. 1.

Partial or contracted views of the gospel, which hide from us the al sufficiency of Christ, and fix our attention chiefly on ourselves, have a most discouraging tendency. Heb. vii. 25.

II. The duty of christians towards one another under these discouragements. "Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees."

Though this exhortation is chiefly applicable to ministers, whose office it is to strengthen the weak, and to comfort the feeble minded, it also points out the duty of all christians towards one another.

How much soever it may be neglected, it is unquestionably one of the great ends of christian society and fellowship, that we should be helpers of each other's faith and joy in the Lord.

1. In order to perform this duty aright, it is necessary to exercise much *tenderness and forbearance* towards those who are labouring under great discouragements. Let the strong bear the infirmities of the weak, remembering that they are a part of the mystical body of Christ. 1 Cor. xii. 21, 25. The compassionate tenderness of the great Shepherd of the flock, is left as a pattern for our imitation. Isai. xl. 11. Matt. xii. 20.

2. Another way in which our compassion may be exercised is to point out to one another *the directions and consolations of the gospel*, according as the case may require; and here the tongue of the learned is necessary, to speak a word in season to him that is weary. Are any discouraged by outward difficulties? Let them cast all their care on him who careth for them; let them commit their way unto the Lord, and be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication make their request known unto God. He that taketh care for the greater, will take care of the less.

Is the hand of the Lord gone out against any of our brethren? Let us relieve their own despondency by pointing out the end to be answered by afflictions; let us remind them of the sufferings of Christ, and of the weight of glory that shall follow.

Are any grieved and oppressed by irreligious connections? Remind them of him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, lest they be weary and faint in their minds.

Are any disheartened and cast down on account of inbred corruption? Tell them to be looking still to Jesus, and to maintain the conflict till death: the God of peace shall bruise Satan under their feet shortly.

Does the weakness and faintness of any arise from a partial relinquishment or misconception of the gospel truth? Endeavour to instruct and teach them in all wisdom, restoring them in a spirit of meekness and love.

Does discouragement arise from a proneness to view the dark side of things? Turn to them the other side also. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways.

3. Let us be concerned to *remove the stumbling-block out of the way*, and so to "make straight paths for their feet." It is here intimated that the defection and irregularities of some of these Hebrews, became a stumbling-block to the rest. They had departed in some measure from the simplicity of the gospel, and so were the occasion of

“turning the lame out of the way.”

If those who have been of longer standing in the church, begin to turn aside, or grow weary in their course, it will discourage the weak, and become a snare to the unwary.

In order therefore to heal and strengthen others, it is needful above all things that we ourselves are found walking humbly with God; a zealous and holy example cannot fail to revive and quicken those who come within its influence. Hos. xiv. 7.

(1) Let us learn from hence, that all our difficulties and discouragements in the ways of God arise from ourselves, and from the evil that is in the world. They originate in a departure from God, or from the simplicity of the gospel: and if we keep near to him, nothing can hurt us. His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace.

(2) How lovely and how interesting is christian society, whose object it is to strengthen and encourage each other in the way to heaven: and how wretchedly defective must it be, if it has not this tendency.

(3) How essential to the christian character are brotherly kindness, charity, and a disinterested but affectionate concern for the spiritual and everlasting welfare of our fellow christians. If their comfort and success be not an object of the tenderest solicitude, we are strangers to the benevolent spirit of the gospel.

RELIGIOUS PROGRESSION.

Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.—Exodus xiv. 15.

Much of the history of this singular people, in their passage through the wilderness, was intended to prefigure the state and condition of the righteous in the present world; and the conduct of God toward them shows what in general would be his dealings with his church in all future ages.

The situation of the children of Israel at this time was one of peculiar difficulty. In the act of leaving Egypt they were surrounded with impassible mountains, Pharaoh and his host pursuing, and the sea in front, when they received a command from the Lord to “go forward.” But how should they go forward?

A command from God always implies a promise, and this it is that makes the path of duty practicable and easy. They went forward, the sea drew back, and they passed over dry-shod, which the Egyptians essaying to do, were drowned.

This was one of the most extraordinary deliverances recorded in Scripture; it was at once adapted to excite their gratitude, and to animate them in their progress to the promised land.

As the command given to the children of Israel on this occasion is

applicable to all who have set their faces Zionward, we shall first offer a few explanatory remarks, and then endeavour to enforce the exhortation.

I. Consider the purport of the command in reference to ourselves.

1. Having set out in the way to the kingdom, there must be no retrograde movement, no going back. Although it is impossible to be saved by our own efforts, or our own strength, yet salvation must be the object of intense desire and pursuit. Obstacles may present themselves in the way, as formidable as those which obstructed the exit of Israel out of Egypt; but he who commands us to go forward will give us strength to overcome. What God requires he will enable us to perform. When Christ commanded the man to stretch forth the withered arm, he knew and beheld his inability; but the paralytic believed in the al sufficiency of Christ, made an effort to obey, and was made whole. The same all-powerful voice which calls us to go forward, commanded the deaf to hear, the blind to see, and the sick to take up their bed and walk. The exhortation of the apostle is of similar import: 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' The command itself will neither quicken the dead, nor arouse the sleeper; yet the power which accompanies it is sufficient to accomplish these purposes, and the Lord delights to make his strength perfect in our weakness, that the power and glory of Christ may rest upon us. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he encreaseth strength. Whatever difficulties therefore obstruct our progress in the way to heaven, let us still go forward, and be pressing on to eternal life. Let nothing deter us in the pursuit, but let us say to every opposition, 'I will go in the strength of the Lord God.' He who is all-powerful has engaged to be with us, as he was with the church in the wilderness, and his arm is sufficient to bear us on and carry us through.

2. "Going forward" is as much opposed to standing still, as it is to our going back. We are not merely to keep in the way to heaven, but to make progress in it; not to stand as statues in an inactive position, but to make vigorous exertions to obtain the prize of our high calling. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. We must not merely retain our religion, but increase in all the graces of the christian character; adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, brotherly kindness and charity. We must enter into no league with Satan or the world, make no compromise of principle, or hold any parley with the adversary; nothing but unremitting diligence and perseverance will insure the crown. The charge given by our Lord to his disciples is still applicable; Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way. Luke x. 41.

II. The reasons that require diligence and perseverance in our christian course.

1. There is great room for progress and advancement in the divine life.

The standard of piety exhibited in the Scriptures is sufficient to fill us with the deepest abasement, to see how few and small our attainments are. Compared with primitive christians, we seem to be only babes in Christ, and have not the knowledge of the holy. The sacred penmen were not mere actors in the scene, they wrote what they felt and handled of the word of life; and judging of ourselves by their elevated piety, we seem scarcely to have realized the unutterable importance of true religion. There is a faintness and a languor in our devotions, and a lassitude in all our services, to which they appear to have been utter strangers. Paul, after a long life spent in the service of Christ, lamented that he had not attained, neither was already perfect: but did he, like too many of us, stand still and lament. No, he pressed forward through hosts of difficulties, and rested not till he could say, I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith, and finished my course. But if we compare our experience with that of primitive believers, or even with many of later times, how weak and defective it appears; and how little do we enjoy of the realizing effects of faith in Christ.

The great work of redemption by him, how little does it interest or impress our hearts: how cold and negligent is our love towards him, and often, how difficult to ascertain whether we love him at all. Yet how defective must be that principle which requires a diligent search, before we can well trace its existence.

How faint is our gratitude to Christ, in return for his unexampled love to us. It ought to rise into a continued flame of devotion; it ought to bear us up above the world, and bear us away like a mighty torrent.

How faint are the traces of heavenly-mindedness, and how much of a carnal and worldly spirit reigns in our hearts. To be spiritually minded is to have our conversation in heaven; but how feeble is the influence which our religion has upon us in this respect. We are going to a country which the Lord has told us of, and yet how seldom do we speak of it to those around us. Could it be so, if we were weaned from the present world, and our affections set on things above; and yet this is what enters into the very nature of true religion. Were we going a voyage to some distant land, men would not converse with us long before they heard of it: we should be talking about its laws, its immunities and advantages, especially if we expected to rise to some station of honour or of emolument. We profess however to be in the earnest pursuit of eternal life, and hope to arrive to a state of honour and glory inconceivable, to be made kings and priests unto God for ever and ever. Yet men might converse with us from time to time, and hear nothing at all about it, nor even know that we were the subjects of such high expectations. Where then is our spirituality and heavenly mindedness.

With respect to genuine humility, how little of it do we possess. How seldom do we esteem others better than ourselves, or are disposed to give honour to whom honour is due. What little prostration of mind do we feel before God, how seldom are we found at his footstool in deep abasement, and how faint the degree of meetness we possess for an immediate audience with the King immortal and invisible.

Were we to pay a visit to a foreign court, we should be all intent upon making suitable preparations,

should study the language, the customs and manners of the court: and shall christians be unconcerned about their meetness for glory, a glory which infinitely transcends all the pomp and splendour of the present world. Surely a great change must take place in our conduct, before we are meet to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light. Every fibre of corruption must be severed from our nature, every particle of pride destroyed, and an entire cleansing of the soul effected, ere we can be fitted to dwell with God. What manner of persons then ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness.

2. We are commanded to go forward in the way to heaven, because the greatest encouragements are given to persevere. God affords distinct manifestations of his presence in the means of grace, and still communes with us from off the mercy seat. He is present with us by his indwelling Spirit, and has established in the heart of every christian a holy shechinah.

He has given to us exceeding great and precious promises to strengthen and invigorate us, and enable us to sustain the toils of the wilderness. His word is fraught with cautions, instructions, and motives to persevere.

He has appointed a gospel ministry, ordinances and means of grace, in order to enlarge and transform our souls, to detach us from all sensible adhesions, to regulate our pursuit of earthly good, and facilitate our advances in truth and holiness. The land of Canaan was a rich compensation to the Israelites, for all the toils of the wilderness; the land of rest to which christians are traveling is infinitely superior, and ought to inspire greater ardour and delight. Say then to the children of Israel, that they "go forward."

3. We cannot be sincere in our professions of religion, unless we make some progress in it. No true believer can be happy without coming as near to Christ as the nature of the union will admit. He who can be content to loiter behind at a distance, betrays a secret love to sin, and is willing to stand where he thinks he can be out of danger, without calculating that 'they who are far from thee, Lord, shall perish.' What would be thought of a person labouring under a dangerous disease, who should be satisfied to have it subdued to a certain degree, and not wish for a total removal of the malady? Such is precisely the situation of the lukewarm or idle christian; he is willing to be saved from hell, but not from sin, and is therefore in danger of utter perdition. No person can stand in a middle station; he is either making advances, or retreating from the course, and going back again to 'his own place.' It is the distinguishing feature of the real christian that he aims at holiness, and is following hard after God.

4. As it is a mark of incincerity, not to be making advances in religion, so it is impossible that minds constituted like ours should continue stationary. They are of so subtile and active a quality that they are always on the advance, or making a retrograde movement. If we are not aspiring after higher attainments in holiness, it is a melancholy proof of spiritual declension, and of a heart divided betwixt God and the world, and of which the world possesses the preponderating part. The mind necessarily has a bias; we are either gradually assimilating to the likeness of the Saviour, or becoming twofold more the children of the devil; it is impossible for minds to lie dormant.

5. The exhortation before us is of importance, inasmuch as the most eminent christians, after all their attainments, have found cause for great humiliation. David's soul melted within him, on the remembrance of God's holiness. Isaiah lost sight of all but his own pollution: 'Woe is me: I am a man of unclean lips.' Job abhorred himself in dust and ashes. Paul did not account himself to have attained, but was reaching forth to the things that are before. The most eminent saints are the most conscious of their own defects. 'Let as many as are perfect,' or initiated, 'be thus minded.' The tendency and genius of the gospel is to teach men the way of salvation: if therefore we are not learners, we have not the spirit of Christ. If not filled with ardent aspirations to know him, and the power of his resurrection; if not seeking those inexhaustible treasures which spring from his fullness, we are none of his.

Let us go then to that fountain of wisdom and knowledge, that we may be made wise to salvation; let us cultivate a teachable spirit, lie low at his footstool, deplore our ignorance, lament our deficiencies and set ourselves to learn of him who is our teacher, our guide and our salvation.

6. It is only by going forward that we can attain to happiness in our religious profession. An inactive or enervated state of mind is inimical to real enjoyment; it is the stretch of thought, the expansion of desire, that forms the essence of our bliss. Holiness is the seed of happiness, the stamina of moral health. It is a celestial climate, where the soul breathes a purer air, and shines with a brighter radiance. To be conformed to the standard of the gospel, to rise above the agitations of the world, and enjoy uninterrupted tranquility, is surely most desirable: and what should prevent it? There is enough in religion, were it all realized, to accomplish this. Holiness is not distinct from happiness, it is happiness itself; and the more any one enjoys in religion, the nearer he will approach to the standard of purity. In our bringing forth much fruit, God also is glorified. By the exhibition of purer religion we shall become as living stones, built on a rock of adamant, which all the powers of earth and hell can never shake. Speak therefore to the people that they "go forward."

7. Not only our happiness but our usefulness also will depend on the progress we make in the way to glory. All the benefit of our example, and all the advantages of our success, will be seen and felt by those around us. While the army is advancing through the wilderness, going forth conquering and to conquer, others will be encouraged to join the ranks, and large accessions will be made to the kingdom of Christ. Such as have no desire to advance, and to make progress in religion, let them retire from the camp; let them renounce their profession, lest others be discouraged by their example. Christ will have no cowards in his army; if we are not determined to rush through all oppositions, and to follow close up to the Captain of our salvation, we had better at once decline his service. To such as are mourning their defects, yet aspiring after holiness, let us speak and say, "Go forward." Your strength may be small, but fear not, Christ will sustain and he will uphold you with the right hand of his righteousness Isai. xl. 28—31.

GOOD AND EVIL INFLUENCE OF SOCIETY.

Iron sharpeneth iron ; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.—Proverbs xxvii. 17.

The psalmist devoutly exclaimed, 'I am fearfully and wonderfully made:' and the influence which men have upon one another is no small part of the mystery of creation and providence. The conduct of mankind, though perfectly free and voluntary, is so much under the eye and under the dictation of society, that no one can escape its influence. The comparison in the text is quite familiar; the friction between two kindred metals gives an edge and a sharpness to what before was blunt and obtuse, and such also is the effect of example and of intercourse in human society. We are naturally formed for intellectual correspondence, and it is in itself a great blessing; but like all other things it is capable of abuse, and so of becoming a snare to us instead of a blessing. The influence mentioned in the text may therefore refer, either to the advantages or disadvantages arising from a state of society.

I. The advantageous influence of society may be briefly illustrated by the following observations.

1. We are so formed as to be capable of being impressed by the sentiments and feelings discovered in *the countenance of another*.

The human features reflect like a mirror the interior of the man. Pleasure, joy, sorrow, love, desire, fear, and most of the passions are strongly marked in the countenance, and by its flexibility we in great measure impart our meaning to those with whom we converse, and kindle similar emotions in their breasts.

A penetrating eye quickens our thoughts, the modest and affectionate looks of a friend soften our hearts to love, while the grave and serious countenance of a godly man inspires reverence and fear.

Christ's looking on Peter, in the hall of the high priest, carried conviction to his heart, and melted him into tears of godly sorrow.

Hence we perceive the advantage of a living instructor, and of preaching, in preference to the practice of reading sermons. The latter, though it may possess the advantages of a good modulation, loses all the benefit and all the interest excited by an illuminated countenance, kindled by the celestial nature of the subject, and speaking more than words can utter.

2. We are also constituted so as to be capable of being greatly influenced by each other *in the duties of religion*.

Hence we perceive the benefit of public worship, where God is worshipped in spirit and in truth; a glow of devotion, an ardour is felt and circulated all around.

How often is admonition, counsel, and advice rendered doubly efficacious and acceptable, by the mien and aspect of the person who administers it.

In acts of kindness and of charity, the benignant countenance often expresses more than the gift, and stamps a value upon whatever is imparted.

3. We are so formed as to be greatly quickened and enlivened by *the conversation of an intelligent friend*, and society in general has a tendency to call forth the exercise of our faculties. Some men possess great powers of mind, and are capable of making important discoveries; but if secluded from society, and left to retirement, their faculties languish, and their vivacity is lost. We scarcely know indeed how much we are to the interchange and collision of society, which is ever pregnant with occurrences and events that excite nearly all the interest that is found in life, while they afford occasion for the exercise and improvement of our mental power.

4. We are the subjects of *many errors and failings* which are seldom removed, except by a free and faithful conversation. There are innumerable misapprehensions and mistakes which admit of correction only by a free communication of ideas between faithful and affectionate friends, and to this we are indebted, more than to any other means, for some of the best of our social feelings. The faithful reproofs of a friend are of great importance, especially when accompanied with meekness of wisdom, a tone and an aspect that disclose the sensibility of the heart. Much of our religious information arises also out of free discussion, and the judicious conversation of some superior friend. More substantial knowledge is perhaps obtained in this way than by mere reading, besides the additional interest that is excited, either by a congeniality of a collision of sentiment and feeling.

5. When *engaged in a good cause* we are liable to great discouragement, if left alone, but are highly sensible of the advantage of being countenanced and supported by others. Even the apostle Paul, on more than one occasion, derived much relief and encouragement from an intercourse with the brethren, in the kingdom and patience of Christ. Acts xxviii. 15. 2 Cor. vii. 6. Such as have suffered persecution for Christ's sake have been sustained by the example of their brethren and have gone joyfully together to the flames of martyrdom. Hence the advantage of christian fellowship, and maintaining an intercourse with all them that fear God, and that keep his precepts. Mal. iii. 16.

6. Under affliction, and *in time of deep distress*, some of our choicest comforts are derived from the sympathy and kindness of those about us.

No medicine is so efficacious, no cordial so reviving, as the angel face of a friend in the hour of adversity. It was this that Job longed for, and was denied. Job. xix. 21. It was the want of this that Paul lamented, when in the prospect of martyrdom; and also our blessed Saviour, when he was agonised in Gethsemane. 2 Tim. iv. 16. Matt. xxvi. 40.

II. Notice some of the disadvantages and evils arising out of a state of society.

Similar remarks will apply to this part of the subject as were applied to the former. We draw and are drawn to evil, as well as good, and there are but few evils that are not susceptible of this influence. Ahab, one of the wickedest of men, was incited by Jezebel to destroy the

Lord's prophets, when perhaps, if left to himself, he would have done no such thing.

More particularly—

1. The sin of *drunkenness* and intemperance is what men seldom commit, except for the sake of company, and from the influence of example. It is that by which men are drawn, and so led away with the workers of iniquity. The "countenance of a friend" has often had this effect, and men become tempters and devils to one another.

2. Profane *swearing* and blaspheming the name of God, is a crime much influenced by example. There can be no pleasure in such profaneness, nor any thing to reward the impious; and where it does not arise from sheer ignorance and depravity, it is chiefly the effect of example, or a wish to appear like other men.

3. The sin of *Sabbath breaking* would not be so common, if the vice were solitary; but the numbers who associate for this purpose, keep each other in countenance.

4. Sinful *anger*, or a spirit of revenge, would appear less frequently, were it not for the collision of turbulent and unruly spirits, or if there were no talebearers. 'Cast out the scorner, and contention and strife shall cease.' Prov. xxii. 10. xxvi. 20.

5. Riots and *tumults* would seldom happen, were it not for the influence of mankind one upon another. Many who would otherwise be peaceably disposed, are hereby emboldened to lawless outrage, and a violation of the public rights.

(1) We learn from hence the importance of selecting our associates, and of being the companions of such as fear God and keep his precepts. Evil company may accomplish our ruin before we are aware, let us therefore be careful to keep clear of its influence, and come not within its vortex. Shun the counsel of the ungodly, and the seat of the scornful. Shun also the company of vain and worldly professors, and keep close to those who are humble and spiritually minded.

(2) Beware of leading others into temptation. It is enough to destroy your own souls; but if you destroy the souls of others, it is still more awful. What an account will some have to give, who have been the means of ruining thousands of others by their impiety and infidelity!

INHERENT DEPRAVITY.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.—Psalm li. 2.

The title of this psalm shows that it was written on a special occasion, yet it is nevertheless applicable to us, for though we may not have the same sins to confess and mourn over as David had, we all need as much to be cleansed and sanctified. Human depravity is the same in all ages

of the world; for though the streams may vary in their course, and men's actions differ in appearance, the fountain from whence they proceed is still the same.

The text contains the prayer of David after he was brought to true repentance, and the language may be considered as the criterion of repentance itself; and every sinner who is the subject of godly sorrow, may here find a prayer suited to his case.

I. Consider what is implied in the prayer and supplication of the penitent.

It is unnecessary to observe that the language is figurative, alluding to the various washings and purifications under the law, which were significant of moral purity. What the psalmist prays for, under the terms "washing and cleansing" is the pardon of sin, and the sanctification of his heart. Sin is here contemplated as a stain or defilement that debased and distressed his soul.

1. We may observe, that *the seat of this defilement is the heart.*

This is the fountain of pollution, from whence proceeds all that is evil in our words and actions. Matt. xv. 19. Moral defilement is sometimes described as residing in the members of the body: hence some are said to have 'eyes full of adultery,' and 'hands that are full of blood.' Such especially is the apostle's description of human depravity, in reference to both Jews and gentiles. Rom. iii. 13—15. Hence also we are exhorted to 'mortify our members which are upon the earth, and to 'cleanse our hands' as sinners in the sight of God. But these are only the instruments of sin; the proper seat of depravity is the heart, or inward temper of the soul, from whence arise all the darkness of the understanding, all the sins and errors of the life. The essence of all holy obedience lies in the state of the heart, and it is the same with regard to moral evil. Now it is true of all mankind, that they are wholly defiled and corrupt, that they are altogether become filthy, and there is none that doeth good, no not one. Psal. xiv. 3.

2. The nature of this defilement is such that it *cannot be removed by any human efforts merely.*

This is implied in the whole of David's confession and prayer: ver. 5, 6. He had no hopes of being cleansed but by the mere mercy of God: and of every sinner it may be said, 'thy wound is incurable.'

Various expedients have been devised for cleansing the sinful heart of man, and there are various ceremonies of human invention, both in heathen and christian countries. Men have inflicted upon themselves the most horrid punishments, have tried every species of mortification and self-denial, but all to no purpose. Prayers, alms, vows, pilgrimages, ablutions, are altogether ineffectual; the stain lies too deep to be removed by such means as these, or by any efforts whatever of our own. These things will neither wash away the guilt of sin, nor subdue the love of it in our hearts.

We may do something to ease the conscience, and then imagine sin to be pardoned; may abstain more from the practice of sin, effect some external reformation, and then hope that our hearts are cleansed; but it is all in vain, and he that was filthy is filthy still.

3. The only way in which we can be cleansed and sanctified, is by *faith in the blood of Christ*. 1 John i. 7—9. Rev. i. 5. Old-testament saints had not such clear views of the way of forgiveness and sanctification as are presented to us in the gospel; yet they were fully taught by their daily sacrifices, that ‘without shedding of blood there is no remission:’ and by their divers washings and purifications under the law, that there needed a fountain to be opened for sin and for uncleanness. Zech. xiii. 1. Our being washed and sanctified by faith in the blood of Christ, includes (1) *Repentance*, or a sense of our defilement, attended with godly sorrow, and self-abhorrence. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness: but if we confess not, he will be faithful and just to condemn. The fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, is for such as look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn, and are in bitterness as for an only son. Faith in Christ always implies repentance, for none but such as do really repent of sin will ever believe in him to life everlasting. The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. (2) This cleansing implies, that the heart being truly broken for sin, longs after *reconciliation* with God; and hence the way of salvation through the mediation of Christ is approved, and becomes delightful to the penitent. Now it is that Christ is precious especially as an atoning sacrifice, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

4. The prayer of the psalmist is that he might be *thoroughly washed and cleansed* from his sin and iniquity, as by a multitude of washings, or an abundant cleansing. This includes, (1) The removal of sin, both as to its *guilt and pollution*. To be pardoned merely would not suffice, nor to be partially sanctified. The penitent desires the entire eradication of sin in every shape and form, that not a fibre of it may be left behind. The blood of Christ also has this double effect, it diffuses both peace and purity; and he is both faithful to ‘forgive,’ and to ‘cleanse’ us from all unrighteousness. (2) This petition for thorough cleansing implies a desire that it might extend not only to the *outward conduct*, but to the *inward love of sin*. Many are washed from their outward wickedness, whose hearts still remain unsanctified. How great the danger here of self-deception! (3) It implies a desire that no *secret sin* might remain unlamented, or unpardoned. Sin is like poison that diffuses itself through the system, the cleansing must be effectual, or the leprosy will not be healed.

II. The necessity and importance of the blessings prayed for.

1. If not washed by the blood of Christ, we have *no part in him*. John xiii. 8. Purity is essential to his nature, and unless we are sanctified we can have no fellowship with him. 2 Cor. vi. 15.

2. If not cleansed from sin, we must be for ever *separated from God*, and all holy beings. Moral pollution totally unfits us for the society of the pure and holy, both on earth and in heaven; and like the leper, we must be excluded from the camp. Even in this world good men feel how much they are unfitted for holy services, when their

consciences are defiled with sin; but how much more, in view of the world to come! The presence of the Holy One would utterly overwhelm us. Isai. vi. 3.

3. If not washed, we must be *exposed to shame*, and everlasting contempt. Dan. xii. 2. Psal. lxxiii. 20. Shame was one of the first fruits of sin, and it will also be one of the last. Righteousness exalts and ennobles the mind, but guilt debases, and fills it with shame and fear, and self-reproach. Such will be the portion of the unholy and unsanctified in the world to come.

4. If not cleansed from sin, it will be to us a source of *unspeakable misery*. Guilt produces a degree of torment in the present life, and such is its natural tendency; but when it comes to bring forth all its bitter fruits, it will be as worm-wood and gall in the midst of the bowels. The agonies of guilt will be like the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.

5. If not cleansed in this life, the stain of pollution will *remain for ever*. He that is filthy must be filthy still: there is no more sacrifice for sin, no more healing grace or cleansing blood. The sinner is without the camp, and there he must for ever remain.

This subject teaches us—(1) That holiness is the chief desire of a real christian—(2) That the way in which alone it can be obtained is through the blood of atonement—(3) That while this blessing is at all times necessary and desirable, it is especially so in the prospect of sacred duties. ‘I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, oh Lord.’

CONFORMITY TO CHRIST.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.—Romans viii. 29.

The following remarks may serve in general to illustrate and explain this important passage—

1. It is asserted that there are some who are *foreknown of God*.

The term knowledge, and fore-knowledge, generally means apprehension merely, or foresight; but sometimes it implies approbation, as in the text, where the objects of it are those whom God approved and intended to bless.

Divine foreknowledge may also be distinguished into general and special. God’s general foreknowledge respects every thing that takes place, for ‘known unto him are all his works from the beginning of the world;’ and if any thing could transpire without his cognizance, it would imply a limitation or defect in that understanding which is said to be ‘infinite;’ or if there could be any accession of ideas, or any new information imparted, it would equally de-

rogate from the all-comprehending and eternal Mind. The divine Being necessarily foresaw the conduct of Judas, and of the Jews towards Christ; and hence he is said to have been 'delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,' while he by 'wicked hands was crucified and slain.' Acts ii. 23. But there is a special foreknowledge in reference to all the redeemed; who are so foreknown of God as to be the objects of his choice and favour. Hence they are said to be his people whom he foreknew, to be elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, and to be chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world. Rom. xi. 2. Ephes. i. 4. 1 Peter i. 2.

2. As many as are foreknown and chosen of God, are *predestinated to holiness*, as the medium of their salvation. Eternal life is the end for which they are foreknown of God, and conformity to Christ the means of enjoying it; so that such as are chosen to salvation are chosen through sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth. Holiness therefore is the only evidence by which we can make our calling and election sure. 1 Peter i. 2. Ephes. i. 4. 2 Thess. ii. 13.

3. God's choosing any to salvation is wholly a matter of *free grace*.

It is not owing to any foreseen goodness in them, nor because they were or would be holy, nor yet that they were or would be of themselves better than the rest of mankind, but of his own abounding grace. He hath mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and compassion upon whom he will have compassion. 2 Tim. i. 9. Titus iii. 5.

4. The end for which we are to be conformed to Christ is, *the advancement of his glory*; 'that he may be the firstborn among many brethren.' All his people shall be made to bear his image, and so become the medium of reflecting his glory. But in all things he must have the pre-eminence; and therefore this likeness to Christ can only be comparative, and not absolute.

I. Consider Christ as the great example or pattern, to whose image we are to be conformed.

1. The nature of man is such as to *require an example* to be set before him. The rule of duty is indeed clearly expressed, and God has shown what it is that he requires of us; the nature of holiness is explained, and the Scriptures direct us how to follow after it. But as men are universally influenced by example more than by precept, it becomes a matter of great importance in the present instance, that a perfect model should be exhibited.

The example of another may convince us that the duty to which we are exhorted is practicable, and from thence we may also learn how holiness is to be attained, and how perfected in the fear of God. An acquaintance with the lives and writings of eminently pious men is for the same reason highly advantageous, and also a connection and an intercorse with such as are truly religious.

2. The best of men, on account of their numerous imperfections, are *unfit to become our example in every thing*. We may indeed derive much advantage from an acquaintance with their spirit and conduct, especially from such as have been distinguished for their close walking with God. We may see much that is worthy of imitation in

their self-denial, their ardent zeal, humbleness of mind, patience in adversity, and habitual devotedness to God: but the best of men are liable to err both in judgment and in practice, and all have their imperfections. It would therefore be unsafe to call any man master, or to set him up as our model in every thing.

Apostles and primitive believers were among the most eminent saints, but they were not wholly free from moral defects; and there is not a righteous man on earth that doeth good, and sinneth not. We are to follow them as far as they follow Christ, but no farther. 1 Cor. xi. 1.

3. The supreme Being, the sum of all excellence, is *not a model suited to our imitation*, on account of the super-eminence of his perfections.

He is himself the standard of all moral goodness, and we are commanded to be perfect, even as our Father who is in heaven is perfect; and to be holy because he is holy. Yet on account of the infinite disparity between God and us, his perfections are the object of adoration rather than of our imitation, except in a very humble and subordinate degree.

4. The Son of God incarnate presents an example *perfectly adapted to our circumstances*, and it is to his image that we are predestinated to be conformed.

He is the true representative of all real excellence, both human and divine. He is so the brightness of the Father's glory, and so expressly the image of his person, that he could say to his disciples, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. I and my Father are one.' Being thus the image of the invisible God, he at the same time displayed all the attributes of our nature; was in all things made like unto his brethren, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

We may here notice more particularly a few things in Christ's example, to which we must be conformed—

(1) He has given us the most perfect pattern of *humility*.

None could say with equal propriety, Learn of me. Matt. xi. 28.

When he came into the world, he did not assume any external dignity, neither did he display his native glory, but veiled himself in flesh, and took on him the form of a servant. Phil. i. 6.

In the course of his life and ministry he sought not the praise of men, but always endeavoured to avoid it. When, on the banks of Jordan, testimony was borne from heaven of his being the well-beloved Son of God, instead of waiting the plaudits of the multitude, he immediately retired into the wilderness. When he wrought miracles, he charged the people not to make him known. No ostentation appeared in any part of his conduct, nor did he at any time lift up his voice in the streets. Matt. xii. 20.

What an interesting example is here; and how little are we like it!

(2) The *self-denial* exercised by our blessed Lord is also intended for our imitation.

His whole life was one continued exemplification of this virtue; he sought not his own glory, his own ease or comfort, and he pleased not himself. The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Matt. xx. 28. He became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. 2 Cor. viii. 9.

This same sort of self-denial is made essential to our being his disciples. Matt. xvi. 24, 25.

(3) Christ was distinguished for his *love and compassion towards men*.

He went about continually doing good, healing all manner of sickness and diseases among the people. His whole conduct was governed by that glorious principle, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Towards his disciples he was all tenderness and love, towards his enemies he was full of mercy and forgiveness, towards sinners he abounded in compassion, seeking their salvation not only by teaching them, but by laying down his life for them. If we are followers of him, this also must be the temper of our minds. Ephes. v. 1, 2.

(4) He discovered a *supreme regard for his Father's honour*.

His obedience was prompt and cheerful, constant and universal; he always did those things that pleased his heavenly Father, and it was his meat and drink to do his will. The honour of his Father's law was to him the dearest of all concerns, and to atone for its violation he at last offered himself a sacrifice. Heb. x. 8, 9.

(5) In his *patience and submission* under sufferings he has left us an example that we should follow his steps. 1 Pet. ii. 21—23.

Job exhibited a pattern of patience, but not a perfect one: but when Jesus was afflicted and oppressed, he opened not his mouth, but even prayed for his murderers. Isai. liii. 7. Luke xxiii. 34.

(6) We are also to have fellowship with him *in his sufferings*, and to be made conformable unto his death. Phil. iii. 10.

We must drink of his cup, and be baptized; with the baptism wherewith he was baptized; must go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. If they call the master of the house Beelzebub, much more them of his household. Matt. x. 25.

But if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him, and be permitted to behold his glory. 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12,

II. Observe the end and design of this conformity to Christ; "that he may be the firstborn among many brethren."

1. Believers in Christ are *brethren*. They have one Lord and Master, even Christ; but they themselves are placed on a footing of equality, and are united in the bonds of fraternal affection. Matt. xxiii. 8.

2. They are also *Christ's brethren*, and he will acknowledge them as such in the last day. Matt. xxv. 40. Heb. ii. 12.

There is a sense in which Christ only is the Son of God, as he is God's own Son, his only-begotten Son, and the rightful heir of that dignity. Heb. i. 4, 5. Believers are sons by adoption and grace, but his is an eternal filiation.

In infinite condescension he took on him our nature, and so became our elder brother. Heb. ii. 11.

3. Our conformity to Christ is predetermined, with a view to his being the *firstborn*.

He is such in reference to all his people, the head of his mystical body of the church. He also is the head of the whole creation, being the rightful heir of all things. Ephes. i. 22, 23. Col. i. 15—18. Heb. i. 2. To him therefore belongs the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.

By making him the standard of moral purity and excellence, to which the whole family in heaven

and earth are to be conformed, and by impressing his image on all their hearts, he appears as the chief amongst an innumerable multitude of brethren, and will at length come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.

ABEL'S OFFERING.

And by it he, being dead, yet speaketh.—Hebrews xi. 4.

In enumerating the most illustrious instances of faith, previous to the christian dispensation, the apostle goes back to the remotest ages of the world, and adduces Abel as one of his heroes, who had ‘obtained witness that he was righteous.’ The object of the writer was to show, that all who were restored to the divine favour since the fall, were received in the same way, not by works, but by faith; the example therefore of the first righteous person was admirably adapted to his purpose. Sin had made a revolution in the world; it had set God and his creatures at variance. Divine justice was armed against sin, and no reconciliation was to be expected without the intervention of a Mediator. Hence sacrifices were instituted at this early period, through which all believers were led to the great atonement, which was to be offered up in the end of the world. If then Abel was justified by faith, it follows that all the generations of that class of persons to which he belonged are justified in the same way, and the gospel is in perfect harmony with the law and the prophets.

I. Notice the particular point of instruction contained in the text.

‘By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.’ It appears from the original record, Gen. iv. 1—8, that Cain was very wroth because his brother’s offering was accepted, while his own was rejected; and that the Lord condescended to expostulate with him on the unreasonableness of his displeasure. ‘If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, a sin-offering lieth at the door,’ ready to be presented. They were placed therefore on the same footing, and the way of acceptance and forgiveness was alike accessible to both. Cain too, as the elder brother, whose prerogative it was under patriarchal government to officiate on such occasions, ought to have presented the sacrifice prepared to his hand: but he chose to approach God in his own way, and virtually set aside that which had been consecrated. He came without a sin-offering, and was rejected. Cain’s offering was merely eucharistical, partaking of the nature of a free-will offering, which was presented in token of gratitude for temporal blessings. Abel’s was a vicarious sacrifice, and contained atoning blood. He therefore offered ‘a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.’ It is true, there was a difference in their occupation: ‘Abel was a keeper

of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground :’ and both might be said to offer according to what they possessed. But still there was a manifest difference in the spirit and manner of the offerer, as well as in the offering itself. Abel came as a sinner, with an implied acknowledgment of guilt, and presented a sacrifice prefigurative of the Lamb of God, who is therefore said to have been slain from the foundation of the world. Cain on the contrary came as self-righteous, as needing no atonement, but expecting to be accepted on the ground of his own deservings, and was offended because his offering was not approved.

Abel’s sacrifice was offered “by faith,” which formed another part of its excellence ; it had respect to some previous revelation from heaven, of the way in which sinners might find acceptance with God. Cain, in rejecting this, might be said to be the first deist that the world produced ; or like some in modern times under a profession of christianity. He appeared to think there was no need of any atonement ; that it is quite sufficient to approach God with expressions of gratitude, and to come to him as creatures which his hand has formed, and his power continues to uphold.

How often do persons present themselves in our assemblies, thereby acknowledging the reasonableness of religious worship, who yet feel no conviction of the evil of sin, and no need of a Saviour. They come as Cain did, to offer some sort of complaisance to the Deity, without reflecting that no outward forms will avail, and that no man can come to the Father but by him who is the way, the truth and the life.

“Abel by his offering, being dead, yet speaks to us,” testifying the uniformity and sameness of God’s method of justifying sinners, with that now presented to us in the gospel. There is in this respect no contrariety between the patriarchal, the prophetic, and the apostolic age: all have testified, that ‘without shedding of blood there is no remission,’ and that faith in the atonement is the appointed medium of salvation.

II. Suggest some general instructions derivable from the subject.

1. We see in the history of Cain and Abel a melancholy proof of the apostasy of our first parents.

If any one can doubt this awful truth, that our nature is contaminated by the fall, the brief but impressive narrative connected with that event is sufficient to produce conviction. ‘Adam begat a son in his own likeness, and Eve conceived and bare Cain ; and she said, I have gotten me a man, the Lord ;’ imagining, no doubt, that he was the promised seed that was to bruise the serpent’s head. Instead of this he was a man of sin, a murderer.

For man’s original offence God had said, ‘Dust thou art and to dust shalt thou return :’ But sin accelerated the curse, and brought to a premature end one of the loveliest of the human race. We need not wonder at the ravages which death has made in our world, when we consider how sin operated upon the first-born of woman, and inspired him with such malignity. It sought the destruction of man from the beginning ; and not satisfied to wait the infliction of the curse, precipitated the first brother into the jaws of death, and doubled the curse as it were by its own hand. Sin entered paradise by temptation, the fountain was corrupted by the first transgression, and the streams have ever

since continued impure: all actual transgression is the offspring of original sin.

2. We see in this history the baneful effects of envy. This it was that induced Satan to seek the overthrow of our first parents, and prompted Cain to kill his brother. The certain effect of this malignant passion is murder, and therefore 'he that hateth his brother is a murderer.' Envy is the offspring of hell, and the progenitor of all the diabolical passions which rage and foam in the breasts of unregenerate men. Gal. v. 19—21. It is this which sets the kings of the earth at variance, which overwhelms with human blood the face of nations, produces factions and intrigues among statesmen, discontents and broils among subjects, civil wars in kingdoms and confusion in families. Envy is the source of injustice and fraud in the trading part of the community, and of those dissensions in religious society which cause one to say, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos.

No one is willing indeed to avow that he is actuated by so base a principle; it is so direful and execrable, that no one can bear to bring it to light; it is a hidden concealed monster, and almost the only one that dreads exposure. Yet how often have you envied the prosperity of another, or felt a secret pleasure in their adversity and degradation.

Let us then be careful to guard against this insidious enemy, and allow him no place to lurk in. Let those especially who have the care of young persons endeavour to suppress this passion, by avoiding all undue emulation, all improper praise to one part of the family, exclusive of the rest. Rather set before them the cruelty and deformity of envy, and its direful effects, as exhibited in this melancholy history. Righteous Abel became its victim; and Cain, who was in this respect the very prototype of Satan himself, was accursed of the Lord, and became a vagabond in the earth. Gen. iv. 11—16.

3. This history furnishes us with the origin of that moral distinction which has ever since prevailed amongst mankind, these two brothers being the representatives of two very opposite descriptions of character.

Abel exhibited a direct testimonial that he was a justified person, for by his sacrifice 'he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and having respect to him and to his offering.' He was therefore the virtual representative of all that have since been justified by faith in the blood of atonement.

Cain on the contrary was the true representative of all worldly characters, expert in agriculture, in architecture, and other secular concerns, building a city, and forming an empire of his own; but an enemy to God, and to all true religion.

Notwithstanding all his schemes of worldly prosperity, 'he was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.' Not having the virtue to aspire after his brother's hopes and enjoyments, he was determined to destroy such a model of excellence, and extinguish that light which appalled and confounded him with its brightness. After the rejection of his offering he gave up the profession of religion, and 'went out from the presence of the Lord:' hence he is placed at the head of all apostates, and as a warning to all future generations. Jude 11. In seeking the destruction of righteous Abel, he

endeavoured to extirpate religion from the earth, and became the first of all persecutors and murderers.

If hated and despised therefore, for your attachment to Christ, 'marvel not:' for from the beginning, he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, and so it is now. 1 John iii. 12, 13. Gal. iv. 29.

4. The history before us affords presumptive evidence of a future state.

God accepted Abel's offering, testified that he was righteous, and caused fire to descend from heaven to consume the sacrifice. And what then? Do we read of Abel's building cities, forming establishments, having a numerous family, and large possessions? No: the next account we have of him is, that he is murdered. But is it possible that the same Being should break the silence of nature to attest his love of righteousness, should behold the victim of assassination weltering in his blood, and incorporating with the dust, and then suffer him to sink into annihilation? That be far from him. Such a procedure would be incompatible with all our ideas of wisdom, justice, and benevolence. In permitting the premature death of Abel, God intended no doubt to convince all future ages, that the scene of our rewards is not the present life. We sow here, and shall reap hereafter; and the exuberance of the harvest is hidden in the eternal garner. An interposing veil obscures the riches and the glory; eye hath not seen nor ear heard what God hath prepared for them that love him.

There must be another state, to account for such a history as this, or the advantage would all be on the side of the offender, who by a deed of atrocity which the sun never before witnessed, made the whole world his own, and subjected all the stores of nature to his research, while the pious and unoffending was cut off from every hope, both present and to come. The existence, however, of a future state of blessedness was clearly intimated, from the earliest ages of the world, for when Enoch was not, God took him: and though Abel was suffered to mingle with his kindred dust, his spirit was conveyed to the regions of light and immortality.

5. Above all, let the sacrifice of Abel speak to us, as it was intended, and lead us to that great sacrifice which takes away the sin of the world. Let us never presume to come to God as creatures merely, presenting our thank-offerings, but as sinners, through the blood of atonement.

There is an overwhelming wrath to come, which abideth upon all who have not fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope that is set before them: and that refuge is the cross of Christ, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. Here only is safety found, and eternal life.

It cannot have escaped notice, how little the Scriptures speak of piety and virtue, and high attainments of religion, as forming the basis of consolation, in comparison of a state of pardon and reconciliation with God. Abel, though the first saint mentioned in Scripture is not introduced to us on account of his superior excellence, but as offering sacrifice; not as a saint, but as a sinner coming to God for pardoning mercy; and by his sacrifice he, being dead, yet speaks to us, and testifies that this is the only way of acceptance with God. Let us therefore never venture into the divine presence, without being sprinkled with atoning blood, and overshadowed with the cherubims that are above the mercy seat.

GOD'S SUPREME DOMINION.

The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.—Psalm xciii. 4.

The government of God over the world of nature and of providence, has at all times been a source of consolation to them that fear him. The devout psalmist contemplates the war of elements and the wreck of nations, with a holy and undisturbed tranquility, while he sees every thing subordinated to the supreme Ruler, and that he is high above them all.

In considering God's dominion, the text may be understood literally of the waters of the ocean, or figuratively of the convulsions of kingdoms and empires, or the risings and threatenings of contending powers. By a very common figure too, the troubled waters are often intended to represent the persecutions, afflictions, and temptations, which oppose themselves to the church and people of God. Frequently in this way the floods have lifted up their voice: but the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.

I. Consider the text literally, as referring to the waters of the ocean.

In this view the power and government of God will be like an anchor to those who do business in the great waters. Many of us live in an inland country, like Issachar, who saw that rest was good, and that the land was pleasant: but others, like Zabulon and Dan, have their lot cast near the ocean, or are perpetually exposed to perils and dangers by sea.

Amid the stormy wind and tempest we sleep securely in our beds, and are apt to forget those who are tossed with tempests, and called to brave the perils of the deep. How often do we hear, alas, of storms and wrecks, and multitudes of our fellow creatures being swallowed up and lost.

Happy for those who embark with this anchor, and in every perilous enterprise are awed, and comforted, and supported by the conviction, that the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.

II. View the text figuratively, or as applicable to the contending powers of the world, which rise and swell like the waves of the ocean, and dash one against another.

At such times we tremble for the consequences, and the description of the prophet seems to be realised. 'The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness: Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits.' Yet the Lord on high is still mightier than the noise of many waters: the possession of empire is at his supreme disposal, and the haughtiest of monarchs have been made to acknowledge this. Dan. iv. 35.

During the last three thousand years especially, the world has been

like a troubled ocean. The rise and fall of the four great monarchies have involved it in the most dreadful calamities, and the floods have lifted up their voice on high. The government of the world has been overturned, and overturned, again and again; and the church of God having had its residence within the sphere of these events has necessarily felt the effects.

Yet the Lord presided over all, and used them all in their turns for purposes of his own glory. Babylon he employed for chastising Judah, and made it his threshing instrument. Persia was raised up to effect Judah's deliverance, by the subversion of the Babylonian empire. The wars of Greece, and especially the persecutions of Antiochus, were made subservient to the purifying of the church. Rome was ultimately employed for the destruction of Jerusalem, and the total dispersion of the Jewish nation. In all these instances the Lord on high showed himself mightier than the noise of many waters, and by his overruling hand he directed and stilled the storm.

If we descend to later history, even since the reformation, we shall find that the wars and tumults between papists and protestants have been overruled for mysterious purposes, by Him who worketh all things according to the council of his own will. It is remarkable that providence has preserved a sort of balance of power between the hostile parties, so that neither possesses any great ascendancy in the line of political importance. Their strength and influence are so nearly balanced as to render them a check and a chastisement to each other, without possessing the means of endangering the existence of either.

What ends God may design to answer by such a posture of affairs, and by the various convulsions which have taken place in our time, who can say? Let us hope that the period is hastening when he will rebuke these waves, and say to all of them as Christ did of the sea of Gallilee, Peace, be still. Thrice happy will those days be. Roll on, ye wheels of time, and hasten their approach. Hasten the period when swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and spears into pruninghooks, and when they shall learn war no more.

III. The text may be applied to those oppositions in particular, which are made to the church and people of God.

These are chiefly of two kinds; persecution, and temptation; and both these are like the waves which lift up their voice on high.

1. Persecution is compared to a flood, cast out of the mouth of a dragon, to overwhelm and destroy the church of God. Rev. xii. 15.

The dragon has in all ages been pouring out his wrath, raging and foaming like the sea; but still the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, and has all along overruled and checked the enemy.

He has used it for cleansing his sanctuary; his fan has been in his hand, and he has thoroughly purged his floor, by taking away the hypocrites like chaff. He has also used it for trying the faith, and love, and patience of his people. God has presided over all, enabling his servants to overcome, through the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony.

2. In a time of temptation the enemy is said to come in like a flood,

and the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him. Isaiah lix. 19.

There are powerful temptations in a time of persecution ; but those which prevail in seasons of peace and security are more seductive. Then it is that the enemy comes in with a flood of errors, like Balaam with his enchantments to destroy Israel. We also are more in danger from having more of a spirit of speculation than those who studied divine truth with eternity in view, and who were compelled to go to their Bibles, not to gratify curiosity, but to seek for consolation in a dying hour, and support under all their sufferings. We have

been too much like sheep going astray, and roaming far abroad, while those who lived in evil times have been like sheep that were torn and worried, and therefore glad to return and keep near the shepherd and the flock.

During the more peaceful periods of the church, christians have unhappily been engaged in contentions and disputes with one another, and so been in danger of being carried away with the flood.

Well is it for the church, amidst all these temptations and dangers, that the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea than the mighty waves of the sea.

What is said of the church and people of God at large, is applicable to individual believers, who amidst all their difficulties and dangers need not despair, seeing that the Lord is high above all their enemies, and in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto them. Psal. xxxii. 6.

MOTIVES TO HABITUAL BENEVOLENCE.

Let us not be weary in well doing ; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.—Galatians vi. 9.

One of the most obvious tendencies of true religion, is to render its possessors conspicuous for benevolence, and for acts of kindness towards their fellow men. It is chiefly in this way that its superior excellence is made manifest, and that it has the power of commending itself to the attention of mankind. Our blessed Lord was the greatest example of benevolence that ever adorned our nature ; he went about continually doing good, and was wholly devoted to the interests of others ; and what he was in perfection, that all his followers are required to be, according to their measure. It is true, that the first effect of grace upon the heart is, to awaken a concern for our own safety ; but the next is, to plant in our breasts a tender solicitude for the welfare of others. Many indeed profess the name of Christ, whose religion does not appear at all to enlarge their hearts, but leaves them destitute of that first resemblance, by which all his followers are distinguished. That religion, however, which leads men to centre in themselves, is nothing more than a sowing to the flesh, which in the end will produce corruption. The

“well doing” recommended in the text, is not to be understood as co-extensive with a christian’s duty; it is rather that particular branch of it which includes integrity, uprightness, and benevolence. There are many interior operations of the mind, of which God alone can judge; but well doing is open to the inspection of all, and of this men can form an accurate estimate.

I. Briefly consider some of the principal discouragements in the way of active benevolence, or what it is that tends to make us “weary in well doing.”

1. There is an apathy in the human mind to what has long occupied its attention: it refuses to take that interest in an object which at first excited the warmest feelings. The mind is generally governed by two laws—novelty and habit. In the absence of religious principle, the most generous feelings are apt to decline, as soon as the novelty which awakened them has passed away. It is the object of the gospel to form men to habits of benevolence, and to make them that from principle, which others are only from feelings of self-complacency, or the desire of public distinction; and we shall soon be weary in well doing, if religion has not its seat in the heart. If a person wishes to be useful in the world, he must mortify himself, must endure privations, and be content to bear reproach; but for this he will never acquire sufficient fortitude, unless the love of God becomes the spring of action. If we would render any essential service to mankind, it is necessary to devote a considerable portion of our time to that object! Some plan must be arranged, the most favourable opportunities must be carefully observed, a variety of expedients adopted, to alarm the fears and excite the hopes of those whose spiritual interest we desire to promote. But no man who lives to himself can endure this course of activity; self is like gravitation, it sinks every thing to one centre, and nothing but the spirit of the gospel can stimulate to a continued perseverance in well doing.

2. We frequently become weary in this course, on account of the various oppositions we meet with from others, as well as from the selfish and corrupt bias of our own hearts. We cannot do much good without disturbing those who are at ease in sin, and who will quickly be alarmed and offended at the zeal and effectiveness of an enterprising piety. In proportion to our activity we shall be stigmatised as proud, self-sufficient, and over forward; our motives will be misrepresented, our characters defamed, and we must be prepared to encounter a host of prejudices.

3. We are in danger of remitting our diligence, in consequence of the ingratitude of those we wish to benefit. Few persons do good in earnest but they meet with some unkind return: yet let us not be weary on this account, since the intention of doing good will always bear its own expense. It is a soil that will yield a spontaneous harvest; ‘he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.’

4. Another source of discouragement is, the little fruit that at present accrues from our labours, and perhaps no immediate good has been effected. Yet we must not be weary on this account; the seed

sown requires time to vegetate, and we must watch and wait the issue. A word dropped to a careless sinner may come to remembrance in a time of affliction, and it is next to impossible but what is sown in faith and love will then spring up.

All the accounts of missionary efforts have at first exhibited great discouragements; in some parts no fruit was seen for several years; but now God is watering the seed sown, and making it fruitful, and a mighty renovation has been effected among the heathen. There is a secret process in the moral world, similar to that which takes place in vegetation; and it is the good pleasure of God to hide it from us, lest we should be elated with sudden success, and snatch from him the glory.

II. The motives to perseverance: "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

1. In well-doing we are employed for God, it is his cause in which we are engaged. He hath sent us into the vineyard; and shall we not eat the fruit thereof? He hath called us to this warfare: and will he not command success? It is God also that worketh all our works in us; and shall not his work prosper? More than this, 'we are labourers together with God;' it is God's husbandry, and God's vineyard; and while Paul is planting, and Apollos watering, will he not give the increase? When it was the sword of the Lord and Gideon, did not Gideon prosper?

2. Perseverance has accomplished great things already, and will accomplish much more. That which first appeared almost impracticable, has afterwards yielded to persevering efforts. The walls of Jericho did not fall down on the first or second day, after being encompassed with the blowing of rams horns, but on the seventh day they were prostrate in the dust. Jacob, in wrestling with the angel, did not prevail till break of day, though he had been engaged all night in the conflict. Paul spent three whole days in prayer before he received the answer, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' Daniel fasted and prayed for three weeks before the angel appeared to him with the tidings, that his prayer had come up before God. The disciples toiled all night at the sea of Galilee, and caught nothing, but in the morning they had a wonderful draught of fishes. In every instance, sowing to the Spirit has been attended with ultimate success, and the Lord has often given that to unremitting perseverance which was denied to faith. Luke xviii. 1-7.

3. Continuance in well-doing has the promise of success, it is therefore as certain as the faithfulness of God can make it. "We shall reap, if we faint not." It may not be immediately however, nor even in the present life, or not till after the labourer has retired from the field, and left it to the care of others. It is the nature of Christ's kingdom to proceed with a slow and gradual increase; it is like a little leaven in three bushels of meal, like a corn of wheat or a grain of mustard seed, all of which require time to operate, and to produce their natural results. Nothing is more uncertain than the success of a single individual exertion, yet nothing is more certain than that God will bless a succession of

unremitting efforts to promote his glory, and the good of mankind. Our attempts to disseminate the knowledge of Christ, by private and public instructions, may produce no immediate effect that we can discern yet in the end it will appear; and if we do not live to behold it, others will be able to trace the hand of the husbandman; for in Christ's kingdom, 'one soweth and another reapeth.' Every truth that is elicited is like a ray of light darted into a benighted hemisphere, till by a succession of efforts the whole world becomes enlightened. 1 Cor. xv. 58. Luke i. 78, 79.

4. In the harvest of the great day we shall reap the fruit of all we have done and suffered for God in the present life. All our present sorrows will turn to rivers of delight, all our conflicts with sin will terminate in complete victory, and all our well-meant endeavours to promote the glory of God, whether successful or not, will then be graciously remembered, and meet a large reward. All the love and kindness shown to the people of God will also be noticed by the Saviour, and not a cup of cold water shall be forgotten. Mal. iii. 16. Psal. cxxvi. 6. Heb. vi. 10. Matt. xxv. 40.

What then is our occupation, and in whose service are we engaged? Rom. vi. 16. Let those who are employed in doing evil, not forget what their wages will be. Rom. ii. 6—9.

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?—Hebrews i. 14.

It was a part of the glory of the former dispensation, that it was attended with the ministry of angels; and this was one thing that rendered these Hebrews so unwilling to relinquish judaism in favour of the gospel. Paul therefore endeavours to convince them that they would lose none of the glory, for that Christ was infinitely above the angels, and they are subjected to his authority: ver. 5—8. This subordination is expressed, both negatively and positively, ver. 13, 14. The angels were never so honoured or so highly exalted as Christ has been, but on the contrary are employed as the ministers of his church and people.

I. Enquire what services the holy angels perform on behalf of the heirs of salvation.

They are said to be "sent forth," having received a commission from the great Head of the church, to administer the affairs of his government, and to manage all things for the good of his people.

1. It appears to be one part of their employment to watch over them, amidst the perils and dangers of the present life. It was a pro-

mise made to Christ, that the Lord would 'give his angels a charge over him, to keep him in all his ways;' and in this promise all the members of his mystical body are included. Psal. xci. 10—14. We know not how much we owe to the ministry of holy angels, in our preservation from the malice of Satan, who goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour; but we know that Satan desired permission to destroy Job, and also to have Peter, but they were placed under divine protection, and the wrath of the enemy was restrained. Job ii. 6.

The plagues of Egypt appear to have been inflicted by the agency of evil spirits, which God permitted for their chastisement; and our preservation from satanical malignity may be much owing to the watchful care of holy angels, who wait around the throne of the great Eternal. Psal. lxxviii. 49.

2. Angels have been employed in communicating instruction, and making known the mind and will of God to his people.

During the patriarchal age especially, the Lord usually sent messages to his servants by the ministry of angels, as well as inspired them with the knowledge of his will by dreams and visions; and though we have no reason to expect similar interpositions, now that the volume of inspiration is comple, yet it is still probable that on some particular occasions, a turn may be given to our thoughts by their mysterious agency.

A lying spirit directed the incantation of Baal's prophets. Satan also is said to have entered into Judas, and to have filled the heart of Ananias, tempting him to lie against the Holy Ghost; it is therefore more than probable that holy angels may suggest warnings and counsels to the godly, and particular premonitions, which are not to be accounted for by any of the laws which are known to govern the human mind.

3. Angels are employed in protecting the church of God collectively, so as to secure it a place in this evil world. It was chiefly by their ministry that God destroyed the Egyptians, and preserved Israel in the midst of them. Exod. xii. 23. In their passage through the wilderness, an angel went before them to lead the way, and to secure them against their enemies. Exod. xxiii. 20—23. Sennacherib's army was destroyed in one night by a mighty angel, when it threatened the desolation of Jerusalem; and when the captives returned from Babylon without any earthly protector, they were taken under the care and guidance of a holy angel, who swayed the counsels of the king of Persia. Dan. x. 13, 20. By an angel was the life of Jesus preserved, during the infanticide at Bethlehem; and by the same hand was Herod smitten for his pride and cruelty. Matt. ii. 31. Acts. xii. 23. The execution of God's judgments upon the kingdom of the beast is entrusted to the holy angels, who pour out the vials full of wrath, which are the seven last plagues. Rev. xv. 6. In all ages the church of God has been surrounded as it were with horsemen and chariots of fire, like the prophet upon the mount. 2 Kings vi. 16, 17. Psal. lxviii. 17.

4. They are appointed in their ministry to be witnesses of the obedience and sufferings of the saints, that they may bear testimony of them before God, and in the great assembly of the last day. Not only was Jesus 'seen of angels,' during the whole of his humiliation upon earth, but Paul also speaks of himself as being made 'a spectacle to

angels,' amidst the sufferings which he endured for Christ's sake. In charging Timothy to perform the work of the ministry with fidelity, the apostle reminds him of the presence of 'the elect angels,' who would be witnesses of his diligence and faithfulness. In the same manner he exhorted the Corinthians to maintain order and decorum in their religious assemblies, because of the presence of the angels. 1 Cor. xi. 10.

5. They appear to act as convoys to the righteous on their decease, conducting them to the realms of blessedness. When Jesus ascended up on high, he was carried by angels into heaven; and it is probable that this honour have all the saints. That is a time above all others when we shall need their friendly aid. We may pity our departing friends, and be pitied by them, but we can neither communicate nor receive assistance. There is no fellowship in death: we must go alone into the world of spirits, unless attended by these heavenly guides; and oh how desirable to be carried by angels, as Lazarus was, to Abraham's bosom. Luke xvi. 23.

6. The holy angels will be employed in reaping the final harvest, and gathering together the elect at the last day. The work of raising the dead, and judging the world, belongs exclusively to Christ; it will be effected by his almighty power, without the intervention of any other agency. Yet he is represented as coming with his mighty angels, and ten thousands of his saints, who will form a glorious retinue, and appear as his ministers of state. They will also proclaim the coming of the Judge; the voice of the archangel shall be heard, together with the trump of God. When also the saints shall be raised from their beds, the angels shall gather them together, and ascend with them to meet the Lord in the air. Matt. xxiv. 31. 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.

II. Observe the fitness there is in employing the ministry of angels, in the service of the church on earth.

1. It tends to display the order and glory of God's kingdom. He has made nothing in vain, for though many things are highly ornamental, yet nothing is made merely for the sake of ornament. The sun, though the most glorious of all visible objects, is not made merely to be looked at, but to enlighten and animate the whole material system. Angels who excel in strength, must have that strength called into exercise, and subordinated to the great purposes of God's universal empire. Whatever diversity there may be in the intelligent creation, and how highly soever some may be exalted, yet all must bow down to his sceptre, and fulfil his high commands. Psal. cxlviii.

2. Angels are thus employed, in order to afford a high example of obedience. Their subjection to the supreme Ruler is the most perfect, their services the most prompt and energetic, moving with the rapidity of lightning to do his will; and in this they offer an example of obedience, worthy of the perfection of their nature. In attending, more especially, to the inferior members of the family, with such unwearied care and assiduity, they present an instance of condescension adapted to fill us with admiration and delight. Psal. ciii. 20, 21.

3. Their ministry is designed to reflect an honour upon the followers

of Christ, who in this world are so lightly esteemed. David thought himself unworthy of being allied to the family of Saul : but how much greater and more unspeakable is the honour conferred on us by an alliance with the holy angels, who make a part of the same family, and are content to act in the capacity of servants towards the heirs of salvation. How great also must be the dangers to which they are liable in their passage through this wilderness, to require the presence and protection of such a flaming guard ; and what vast treasures must they be heirs to, who are thus escorted to their final home.

4. Their ministry is more especially intended to confer an honour and a dignity upon the mediation of Christ. It is a part of the reward of his humiliation, that angels, principalities and powers, are made subject unto him. God not only requires all men to honour the Son, even as they honour the Father, but hath commanded all the angels to worship him. He hath given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. Sinful men have despised and rejected him, but all the angels in heaven shall serve and adore him. Ephes. i. 22. Phil. ii. 9—11. Rev. v. 11.

5. The ministry of angels, on behalf of the heirs of salvation, may tend to prepare things for the world to come. The intercourse begun on earth will be completed in heaven, where the different branches of the family meet together ; and the services rendered by the holy angels, during the weak and infantile state of the church, become a source of mutual congratulation and delight. Thus at length will be gathered together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth ; even in him. Ephes. i. 10.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT.

They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb : therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple : and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.—Revelation vii. 14—17.

The opening of the six seals, in the former chapter, was the signal of great calamities to the world, during the first three hundred years of the christian era. On the opening of the seventh seal, in the following chapter, there appeared seven angels, with seven trumpets, each of which foretold the temptations and dangers that should attend the church, and what it should suffer under the reign of antichrist. Between the opening of the seals and the sounding of the trumpets, there

is, however, a suspension of these calamities; the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads, to secure them from the judgments inflicted on the world; and a vision is given of the Church triumphant, or of such as have overcome the grand adversary. The darkness of prophecy is now dispelled, as well as the gloomy events foretold by it.

The text, though it may refer more immediately to the martyrs who suffered under the persecutions of the pagan Roman empire, and who are therefore described as "coming out of great tribulation," applies nevertheless to all the redeemed, who must "wash their robes, and make them white in the blood of the Lamb," before they can appear before the throne of God.

I. Consider the nature and the medium of our sanctification.

Here the following preliminary remarks may be offered—

1. That by the "robes" is meant the disposition or habit of the mind, or state of the inner man, which by an elegant figure of speech is compared to the dress or adorning of the outer man. Hence believers are required to be 'clothed' with humility, and to 'put on' the Lord Jesus Christ. There were a few of the church of Sardis who had 'not defiled their garments;' and to denote watchfulness, others are commanded to 'keep their garments.' Rev. iii. 4. xvi. 15. Isai. lxi. 10.

2. The state of our minds in the present life, even though in part sanctified, is such as to require a still greater purification. "They washed their robes, and made them white," which implies that they had not before been thoroughly cleansed. Even those whose garments are now without a spot, and who are holy and harmless as the sons of God without rebuke, must yet undergo a higher degree of purifying. We are sure it must be so with regard to ourselves, for we are as an unclean thing, says the prophet, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

Our thoughts, desires, and passions are all defiled; and indirectly, all our bodily senses and members, our eyes, our ears, our hands, and feet. Whatsoever we touch it is polluted; our preaching, praying, reading, and all our religious services. Selfish or defective motives impair all we do for men, and pollution stains all we do for God. The divers washings under the law were intended to establish this awful truth, and to convince the worshippers of the need of constant purifying.

3. Nothing we can do is sufficient to remove this moral pollution, neither duties nor sufferings. Multitudes of those holy ones, who are now before the throne of God, had been washed in the Mosaic laver in Jerusalem, and baptized in the waters of Jordan; others who "came out of great tribulation," had been bathed in blood, and baptized in suffering; yet to none of these things is any efficacy ascribed. Neither martyrdom, nor prayers, nor tears can take away sin. Tears will do to wash the Redeemer's feet, but not to cleanse our souls.

4. The only medium of our sanctification is the sacrifice of Christ. They washed their robes and made them white "in the blood of the Lamb." It is the blood of atonement that expiates human guilt, and

this alone it is that cleanseth us from all unrighteousness. Our being "washed" in this blood supposes a believing intercourse with the Saviour, that we are coming unto God through him, and that in all our prayers for pardoning mercy, our reliance is wholly on his atoning blood. More particularly—

(1) It is by the blood of the Lamb that guilt is discharged from the conscience, and this is the only way in which it can be removed.

Many when first awakened, have recourse to other expedients. They refrain from sin, and that gives a little ease; they renew their religious endeavours, and shed tears of remorse, and so conscience is pacified; but it is only for a little time; there is no abiding peace, and no real purity.

Nothing but an application to Christ can heal the soul, looking to him whom we have pierced, and mourning at the sight. This it is that leads us to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and there it is we find pardon and peace. Zech. xiii. 1. Rom. v. 1.

There is indeed a wretched propensity in us, all our life long, to avoid a spiritual application to Christ under a sense of guilt, so that our sins are frequently worn away, rather than washed away in the Redeemer's blood. Sometimes our hearts feel hard, and we are as if we could not come; at other times we are ashamed, and know not how to come. Sometimes we are insensible to the danger of the disease, and resting in a sort of carnal security, are content with merely confessing and complaining. There is still too much remaining love of sin, that makes us unwilling to bring it to the cross of Christ to be crucified. Yet whatever be the cause of this reluctance and delay, there will be no real peace, no solid comfort, till we have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb. Psal. xxxii. 3, 4.

(2) It is by the sacrifice of Christ that we are sanctified as well as pardoned and cleansed from all unrighteousness. Pleading for mercy in his name is evermore attended with brokenness of spirit, and self-loathing on account of sin; and the more we look on him whom we have pierced, the more we shall be in bitterness and shall mourn. Nothing sets the ingenuous heart so much against sin, as a view of Calvary. Oh to think what it cost the Lord of glory to expiate our guilt. The love of Christ in dying for us, is an overwhelming consideration, and fills the soul with shame and wonder and delight. It is by the cross of Christ that the world is crucified to us, and we unto the world. To Him therefore that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion forever and ever. Rev. i. 5.

II. View the glorified and triumphant state of those who have thus been sanctified. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, &c."

This denotes unspotted purity: having been washed in the blood of the Lamb, they are now presented faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy. Jude 24. Ephes. v. 26, 27. Their dwelling before the throne is also expressive of the peculiar favour with which they are received by the King immortal and invisible. They likewise appear with triumphant honour, as those that have overcome, and are now wearing the robes of victory. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

They "serve him day and night in his temple." The priests under the law were consecrated to their office by being first washed and purified in the sacred laver, and in allusion to this it is that his sanctified ones are made priests in his holy temple above, where they serve him without intermission or repose. *Exod. xl. 12, 13. Rev. i. 5, 6. xxii. 3. Psal. cxxxiv. 1.*

"And he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." This expresses infinite condescension, the most entire reconciliation and satisfaction. He is no longer as a wayfaring man, who tarries only for a night, but dwells perpetually among them, and holds uninterrupted communion with those whom he hath redeemed and sanctified, through the blood of the Lamb. *2 Cor. iv. 16.*

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." In this world they suffered hunger and thirst, and weariness; were destitute, afflicted, tormented; but this shall be known no more, while all their spiritual desires shall be abundantly increased and satisfied, for they shall drink of the rivers of God's pleasure, which are at his right hand forever more. *Psal. xvi. 11. xxxvi. 8.*

"Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." Like Jacob, who said that while attending the flock of Laban, 'in the day the drought consumed him, and the frost by night;' so these pilgrims had often been weary and faint in their course, and subject to many hardships, injuries, and inconveniences. But now they are forever freed from all these calamities; neither the fire of persecution, nor the frost of adversity shall annoy them any more.

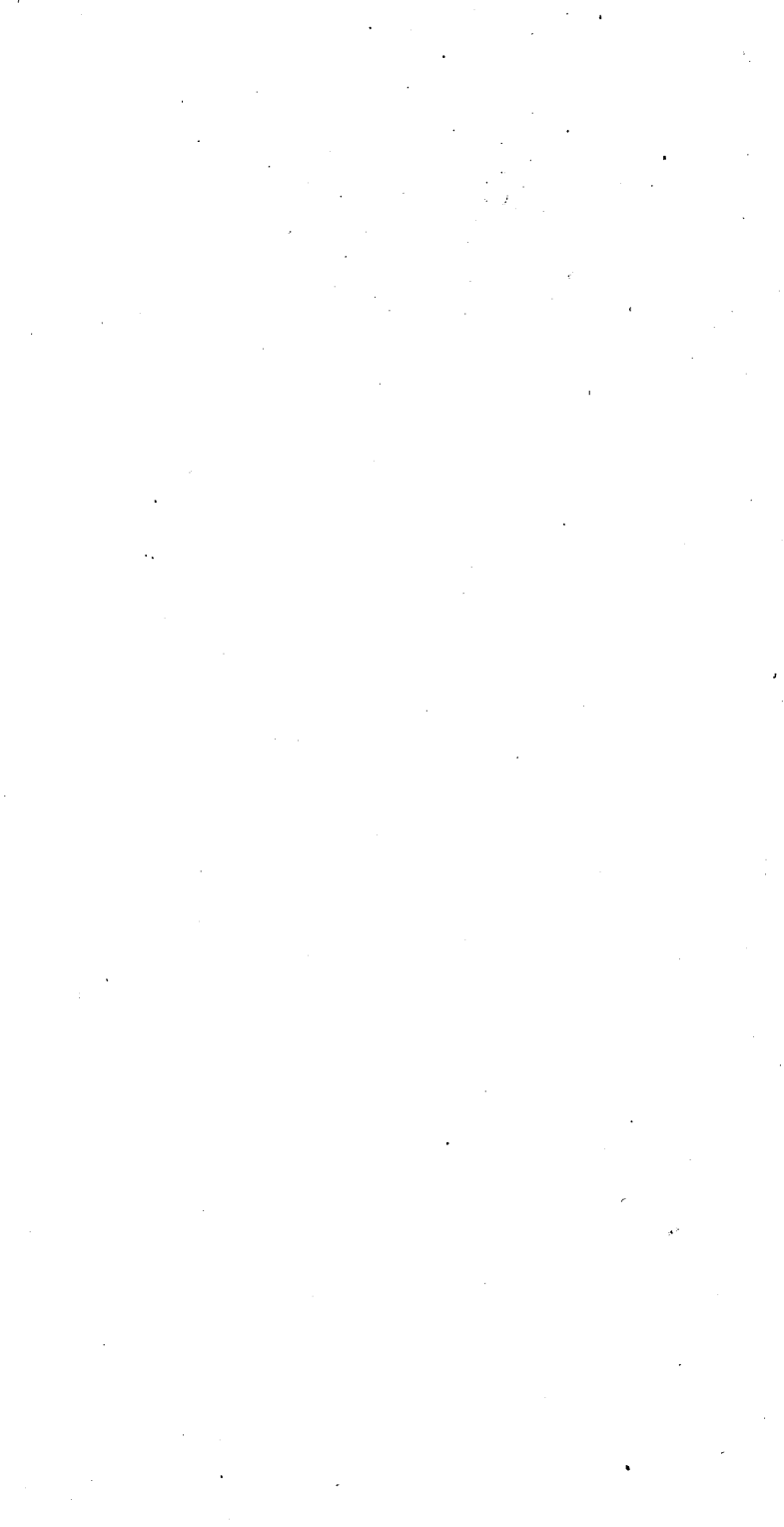
"For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." In the present life the sources of sorrow are innumerable, and many of the Lord's people are weeping, like Rachel, and refusing to be comforted. 'I considered, says Solomon, all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and beheld the tears of the oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter.' Some are afflicted under the hand of God, mourning the loss of relatives or friends, or are sunk into deep adversity. Some are weeping over the sins of others, parents over their children, and pastors over their flock. Sin, the cause of all other evil, is an unfailing source of bitterness to all the saints on earth; and though in heaven they shall weep no more, it will never cease to be remembered with abhorrence and deep abasement.

God is here represented as a compassionate Father, assuaging the grief of his afflicted family, and receiving to his arms and to his bosom, the children who had long been oppressed with a weight of sorrow and affliction. Now there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things have passed away. *Rev. xxi. 3, 4.*

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